

# JENIFER

^^LUCY^^  
MEACHAM  
THRUSTON

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JENIFER









"SHE STOOD WITH WIDE, DELIGHTED EYES AND FLUSHED  
CHEEK, AS JENIFER RODE UP TO HER."

(Page 189) FRONTISPIECE

# Jenifer

By

LUCY MEACHAM THRUSTON

AUTHOR OF "A GIRL OF VIRGINIA,"  
"MISTRESS BRENT," ETC.

*With a Frontispiece by*  
*J. W. Kennedy*

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**Julius Thruston**

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# J e n i f e r

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## I

A YOUNG man was fishing on the Chowan. The brown, clear current of the river sang under the stern of his boat, and went rushing, dark and cypress-stained, down by bold woods which marched to the brink of the water and studded the bed of the river with gnarled cypress-knees, on where the land was low and rushes grew, where the waters split about the islet Blackbeard loved, and out to the wide blue sound.

Back by the boat, up in the heart of the swamp-land, the sun glinted deep yellow in the ripples about the sun-grayed stumps, whose crowns had been wafted down the easy river road. It gleamed upon feathery shoots of the denuded trees, upon the mistletoe which nested in their tangles, and on the man, lazy, content, and blissful, in the flat bateau.

A string of sunfish flapped in the wet bottom of the boat. A bass that had fought for life and set the water swirling, and had exercised the fisher's breathless skill, panted beside them. A fresh-cut sapling, with fishing

cord and hook wrapped about it, trailed from the stern.

The man had had enough, and for his guerdon were spring sunlight and mist of gray and green upon the hills above the marshland, the blue and tender sky, — and that unnamable bliss of wind and wood and water and life, and the beat of a man's pulse with it, rhythm to rhythm.

The sun shone hot upon him, and the water held and flung back the radiance. With a lazy twirl of the oar at the boat's broad stern Jenifer turned shoreward.

The day was his, and it was not half-gone. He knew how the store from whose imprisonment he fled looked at this noon hour, big and dark and cool; outside, the white road, the cotton-gin, the bales beside it; and beyond them the thread of swamp which marked the stream. Fifty yards from the weather-beaten store the railroad track came down across the cotton-field, and the lowered rails of the chestnut fence gave it exit. At the edge of the swamp towered the tank which fed the engines' boilers; and the trestle set its foot in black swamp, and bore its bridge beneath poplar and gum and cypress, while the stained waters ran below. The hum of the one train down — one up, one down, each day — was on the rails, he knew; the warm air shimmered on the road, on the dip of river-land, and the gin across the way; and the thin line of the engine's smoke was in the air. But for him was the rustling of last year's leaves beneath his tread, the setting of his feet on ferns uncurled and tender flowers, the gathering of twigs, the watching of

blue smoke and licking flame, and the sputtering of fish upon the embers.

His face, where manhood had not yet firmly chiselled the features, was in his curved hands. His long limbs were deep in old leaves and new flowers. In his pockets was plenty on which to break his fast, biscuit brown and light, ham smoke-cured and pink, cake crumbled to a mass of sweet and fruit and icing, — but the fish he broiled upon the coals made his feast. When he had eaten, Jenifer went tramping off for a draught to finish it.

Low as the land lies along the Chowan here it rolled to round swells of hills, whose feet were in the water, and up whose sides towered trees trailing long gray moss upon their branches. New leaves were on their tips. The low rustling of their soft motion filled the air; that and the young man's tread. Around one curve he went, and up another hill. A trickle sounded near. Jenifer found and followed it to a spring where heart's-leaves swept to the brim and ran, with flowers and ferns, to the hilltop. Between the line of the heart's-leaves and the river was bare clay.

Jenifer looked at it carelessly. Here it outcropped, and there, and further yet amongst the low hills, and it was neither red nor yellow, like the clay of the land, but gray.

Suddenly he sprang across the narrow stream, shaped a ball of the stuff eagerly, washed it in the water, and set off running towards the curl of smoke above the coals. Enough of them were glowing red to roll the ball upon and cover it. He piled fresh



branches, cypress cones, and pine bark, and watched fiercely. When the porous, biscuit-colored ball rolled in the dead leaves at his feet, he snatched it and stood up shouting, tossing it from hand to hand, while it scorched his hardened palms. Then he sat down soberly, the soft sheen of the thing between the ferns beside him.

Men have written the world's fairy-tales, but the masculine mind loves them not. Jenifer, with that ball, shaped like an apple, at his feet, knew nothing of the lore which might have compassed it, no legend of the Hesperides, of Paris, of Solomon, and the tale of Paradise was not remembered; but he knew the stuff of which this was fashioned, and the knowledge overwhelmed him.

He got up and made his way towards the stream and the sticky sloughs half-covered by drifted leaves. He followed where further and deeper the gray stuff showed. Every sinew of him was strung, his black hair matted with sweat. He took to his bateau, paddled furiously up-stream, landed, and tramped the wood; but when he reached the road the whistle which usually marked his way was silent.

The string of fish was in his hands, the sapling fishing-rod on his shoulder, and his black hat low over his eyes. The heat of the day had intensified, and was still and significant. A line of gray cloud hung above the pines towards the west. The sandy road was empty.

It wound by fresh plowed earth and green fence corners, through woods and past unkempt fields, to a sandy stretch between newly planted cotton lands and

the borders of the swamp. The black tank that fed the engines stood out against the tender greens and the dark mistletoe in the tree-tops like a tavern sign. Beyond it were the store and cotton-gin, — the road between, — the white line of paling before the merchant's house, the cluster of home buildings, and the green of the live-oaks about them.

The owner stood in the store door. "Back early," he called to the young man tramping the hot road. "Good luck? Lord, I should say so," starting out to meet the fisherman. "Look at this!" handling the bass wonderingly. "Where did you get him? You don't say so! Take them around to the house. Tell Jennie to have them for supper. He's a buster. Better go again!"

Jenifer propped his fishing-rod by the step, and stood in the sand before the door, as if weighing the fish in his hands.

Mr. Cross looked at him curiously, but Jenifer's wide hat hid his face, all but the chin, and that was well thrust out.

"Mr. Cross," the young man began hesitantly, "who owns that land down along the river? Down along where I have been fishing."

"Back of Wilmot's?"

"I suppose so."

"Jack Harrell."

"Harrell?"

"He does; and he might as well not have it. Better off without it, for it won't pay taxes! And he — he's got enough to carry anyhow. Timber cut off that land

long ago — what was good for anything. Is it growing up again? Want to buy it? Nothing but hill and swamp and clay. Want to buy it?" he repeated as if it were a huge jest. "Know anybody who does?"

"No," said Jenifer slowly.

"If you do, you can tell them for me that they'll be taken in, sure pop. Better carry those fish around. Jennie'll be in the kitchen soon."

Jenifer had his hand on the big gate which opened on the wide yard; inside of that was a fancy paling about a flower garden, with a little green gate opening on the path to the porch. "Mr. Cross," he called back, "do you want me right away?"

"No, you've got a day off. Better take it all."

"All right!" Jenifer slammed the big gate behind him, and circled the house toward the kitchen.

He came out behind it, took a path which cut across the field, and gained the railroad track, following it to a thicket of gallberries and cedars. He had not noticed that the gray clouds were covering the sky and the thunder which shook the air had rolled unheeded, but when he came out in a churchyard, beyond the thicket, a sudden heavy pattering struck the young leaves overhead and in a second a burst of stinging, lashing rain beat on them. The wind tore and twisted the heavy branches of the oaks and raged across the level yard.

Jenifer raced for the church steps. They were unsheltered and leaf-strewn. He shook at the big folding doors, and the old lock loosened under his hands. The wide doors flew open. He entered, and stood laughing as the rain swept across the worn, unpainted steps

and beat the thin grass, and the big drops lay like shot in the sand.

A flash of lightning tore across the sky; the thunder crashed louder; the rain rushed in sheets across the yard. What Jenifer had thought a spring-time shower was like a summer storm, and he was prisoner.

The big room back of him was dark and dusky, the ceiling gloomy, the windows narrow, and rattling in their casements. The pulpit towered high and white and solemn. The thrill of awe along the young man's nerves was nonsensical; he was sheltered and safe. But it was dark. False night was in the church, false dusk under the oaks, and a thunder of rain was on the steep roof.

Jenifer walked slowly up between the bare pews, and stopped with his hands on one. He smiled as he remembered how soberly he had last Sabbath sat there. Now he was tired. He stretched his big limbs on the bench, and in a second he was asleep.

He slept but a scant quarter of an hour, but so soundly that it made oblivion between the world he had slipped from and that to which he awakened. A roof stretched high and dark above his head. The pew-backs shut him in. What was this awesome place? What did the dim distance hide? A square of light shone through, and something ghostly seemed to flit from it towards him. Nearer it came, some mystery materialized from the borderland; and in that instant of awe between awakening and realizing Jenifer had an insight, like a flash, into the thing which seemed to him natural, which he had planned by the river and along the road,

and was hurrying to accomplish when the storm overtook him. He saw it, not as it would be to legal eyes, but as it was.

Then the ghostly object touched his nerveless hand and he knew it to be alive, not spiritual essence, but animal life.

His laugh, with a strange note in it, rang to the rafters; still, young though he was, neither seeing nor speculating upon life, Jenifer had stood for one heavy heart-beat in the illuminating light.

It faded instantly. A draught from the shallow well, a dash of cold water across his eyes, a long baring of his head to the fresh wind, and Jenifer hurried on. The scent of wet earth and leaves blew about him; a faint rainbow was outlined upon the sky; and in the road a troop of school children, kept housed by the sudden storm, went merrily homeward, tall girls, and big boys, and a slip of a girl for teacher. The tin pails on their arms flashed the low light towards him.

Across the road, far down a lane, was Harrell's home. The storm had broken over him as he planted cotton in the rows. The hour of sunlight left could not be wasted, and Harrell was hurrying across the furrows with a basket of the round gray seeds hanging on his arm. Jenifer, through the thicket of sassafras, could see him standing boldly out against the brown earth and the perspective of the wooded swamp; and he bit his lip and flushed and laughed at thought of what he, unseen, must see.

Harrell had caught sight of the troop in the road



and strode to the fence to intercept it. The girls ran away giggling, the boys hurried with long sober steps and half-scornful faces; and the little teacher was left in a pretence of wonder opposite him, and alone.

"Bess," he called softly.

"Oh, Jack! Is that you?"

Harrell laughed. When had he missed a day from seeing her somewhere along that road? "You are late to-day." He leaned contentedly against the shining rails, as if cotton planting were done.

"Yes, the storm caught us."

"Were you scared?" he teased.

Bess stood poised as if for a run. She could have beaten every girl who loitered slowly along the sandy way, had they raced her to the pines which shadowed the road where the boys went slowly.

"I don't see why you won't speak to me," the man coaxed.

"I?"

"You, there in the middle of the road. I haven't seen you before to-day."

"No." She stole a glance at him around the corner of her big sunbonnet.

"I am coming over there." Harrell put his hands on the fence as if to spring over. "I am going to walk home with you."

"No, no; you must not." In her earnestness Bess came close up to the fence.

"I don't see why I shouldn't." But Harrell was satisfied. He had made the threat only to bring her nearer.

"School will soon be over," he said tentatively. "Are you glad?"

"A little," with a shy look up at him. Her lashes were long and her eyes which should have been brown, in keeping with her coloring, were blue. Her cheeks, with the tint of that bonnet upon them, were pink as a wild rose. "You see the hot weather is coming on, and the thunder-storms. They scare me almost to death," she admitted.

"This one was not so bad," declared Harrell lightly. He was thinking how hard it was to see her face and longing to untie the starched strings beneath her chin and touch her warm cheek with his hand.

"But you never know what the next one is going to be like, once they have begun."

"How is your mother?" he asked abruptly.

"Just the same. She was walking about a little when I left to-day." Harrell had broken the spell of the happy moment. "I must hurry. The girls are waiting. It is getting late." The little hand that had rested for a moment on the rail moved nervously.

Harrell stooped to break a branch of spicewood that grew close by the fence. His hat fairly brushed her hand as he leaned, and when he straightened again his lips had touched it warmly and tenderly; and the girl's face was redder than the wild rose ever blooms. She was half-way across the road before he could speak.

"Good-by," he called.

"Good-by," said Bess faintly; but the tunnel of her bonnet was toward him.

Jenifer waited till the pines hid her and the laughing

girls — the boys were far ahead — and when he came up with Harrell the farmer's back was toward him. The basket of seeds was at Harrell's feet, the spicewood still in his hand, and he was looking at it, smiling.

"Hello, Harrell!"

There was no friendly flash in Harrell's eyes as he turned. He felt himself spied upon. "Well, Jenifer," he said carelessly.

"Planting cotton?" anything to cover up the awkward moment.

Harrell picked up the basket and began sorting the seeds between his fingers. "Yes."

"I wanted to see you a moment," stammered Jenifer, keeping pace with the farmer down the row.

"Anything special?" Harrell straightened.

"Well, yes; I suppose so. You have got a good deal of land about here."

"More than I can manage by myself; and hands are not to be hired."

"And some down by the river. Want to sell any of it?"

"Which?"

"How about that down on the river?"

Harrell stood gazing at him with something of the same searching look Mr. Cross had given. "It's worth nothing," he said shortly, "nothing at all."

"What will you take for it?"

"There are a hundred acres, maybe more. If it's worth anything it's worth five hundred dollars." Harrell was impatient with what he thought foolery. He dropped the seeds into the hill by his side, shovelled

the earth above them with his foot, and went on with his planting.

Five hundred dollars! Jenifer had just that sum. It was locked in Mr. Cross's safe; and it was what the clerk had earned, barring the expenses of his clothes, behind those counters. Last year his employer had made money in cotton bales, buying them up through the county, stacking them under the live-oaks in his yard, and selling them as the market jumped. Jenifer had intended to do with his small sum what Mr. Cross had done with more. He had even played the game in fancy.

The telephone from that quiet corner in the gin stretched across to a market of the world; but the machines were new, following only the railroad, and there were few in the county. The knowledge they brought could be used for gain. This argument flashed through Jenifer's mind while he broke a clod beneath his heel; yet he was capable of instant reply.

"Very well, I will take it."

"You!" Harrell whirled around. "What's come over you?"

"Nothing." Jenifer's boyish face was imperturbable.

"Lord knows I want the money bad enough, but I don't want to sell," added Harrell inconsistently.

"Well," said Jenifer calmly, "I have the money, and I want the land. If you will come up to the store we can draw up the papers, and I will pay you."

Harrell whistled under his breath. "I'll see about it," he promised at last, "and come up and let you know."

"To-night?"

"No, to-morrow." He would look over the land again to see if there was anything in it; if not —

"Good night," called Jenifer.

"Good night."

Jenifer went whistling homeward. The moon hung above the cypress swamp; the west was red; the sand wet and hard underfoot; the air cool: and there was a possibility in Jenifer's mind which dazzled him.

When he walked into the store a schoolboy who had been bidden to make a purchase lingered there. His books were on the counter. Jenifer, hiding his exuberance, opened one of them with a nervous hand. It was a geography, thick leaved, big printed, and well thumbed.

"Mr. Cross," called the young man gaily, "I bet you have forgotten every bit of geography you ever knew."

"The idea!" his employer flashed.

Jenifer turned the pages quickly. "What zone do you live in?"

"Temperate." Mr. Cross straightened his tall figure by the doorway.

"North or south?" Jenifer pressed him.

"South, sir; of course. What do you take me for?" shouted this warm partisan, and for a second he wondered why his clerk doubled with laughter by the counter.

## II

JENIFER's money was in Harrell's pockets; the deed to Harrell's river land lay in the squat black safe where the slow-mounting greenbacks had been hid; and a daily train, which wound its way northward, had carried with its other freight a wooden box, small but heavy.

Jenifer waited. The days slipped by with a beauty which sickened him. The mistletoe was hidden in the tree-tops; the cypress trailed its green to touch the river; gum and poplar bowered the tank beside the glistening rails, and the poplar had flowered. Still, never, as the train came down across the field, where the cotton showed its leaves, was there packet or letter for the young man, whose face lost its boyish roundness in that waiting.

When the hiss of the freed steam filled the air and the thud of the pumping was like a steady beat upon the heavy atmosphere, he stood daily, talking, perhaps, with the conductor and looking at the few faces against the dusty window-frames or swinging his feet from the door of the baggage-car and eyeing the lean mail-sacks by his hand, feeling that he could grasp the coach and shake it from end to end in his mad impatience, or rip the sacks with fierce gashes and scatter every packet in fern and weed and oozy mud, but to grasp the one he looked for.



Watching the gray-striped bags and tarnished metal, he took to riding across the shadowed trestle and around the sandy curve to the cross-roads, the station, and the post-office, where one had the right to unclasp the locks and handle with careless touch those frail things which meant so much: and never one of them for him.

Then he grew tired of it. Any one who wished might bring the mail. The man to whom he had written had cared too little even to answer him; and Jenifer set his teeth, and wondered how now he should start to better his fortunes, as he had vowed he would do. That dream of cotton speculation had been his only other plan; and the money with which he could have speculated was gone.

Back there, in the State from which Jenifer had come, a man with money in his hand had founded a school where any boy who lacked the means to gain it elsewhere could find an education. The lad's need should be his only plea. Even such as Jenifer, who boasted no lineage and knew no kin, were welcomed. From the knowledge gained in his primer lessons of the laboratory Jenifer had made his guess; and to the chemist, whose seeming magic he had watched, the package had been sent; but there had been from the professor only silence.

Jenifer told himself that he had been forgotten as soon as the door of the school closed behind him. Before he, homesick for the shouting boys and friendly men, had found the means to earn his bread and grown frightened in the city market-place for labor; before,

by happy chance, he had fallen in with the merchant, a visitor to the city, who needed a clerk for his country store and fancied the boy's earnest face and still tongue and length of limb and air of strength; before he, the graduate, had found a home, the school had forgotten him.

The thought was bitter. The friendliness of his schoolfellows was the best Jenifer had known. His mother had died before he had knowledge of her; his father was scarce a remembrance; and the school had been his brightest memory.

At last, when many a day the train had gone unnoticed through the trees and over the narrow river, on a slumberous afternoon, after the curl of smoke above the cypresses had floated long away, Jenifer came from the counting-room at the sound of a shout in the dim cool store.

The room was deserted, but he heard the patter of a boy's bare feet across the step.

"Jim, Jim," Jenifer called from the door, as the negro opened the yard gate, "what do you want?"

"Lettah fer you; on de countah."

He leaped for it. Before he caught it up he saw the black typing of the school's address in the corner. It had come. He held it. But it would tell him he was a fool for his pains. He stood with the letter in his hands, and the cold sweat was on his forehead. Then, in a second, he had torn off the cover, whirled out the leaves, seized the meaning from them, and was dancing, as if mad, from end to end of the huge high room.

"Kaolin," he shouted. "Kaolin, kaolin!" And

then more soberly and under his breath, "I knew it, I knew it."

The dusky place was not big enough for that flood of rapture; all the world in sight could scarce afford space. So still it was that at the counting-room door the fowls scratched and clucked and peered with sidewise glances into the room. The road was deserted. Besides, the clerk could watch from across the way. Jenifer was out, beneath the sky; and in the cool shadow of the closed gin he spread the stiff pages and read and weighed each word.

Had that biscuit-colored ball been the apple of Hesperides the magic were not more certain.

The package had reached the school when the professor was ill and it had lain long in the laboratory. Analysis had proven the stuff to be of the highest value and — so strange are the crossings of fate — the chemist, well-known for his research into the native values of his State, had that month received a letter from a great pottery of the West asking if he had knowledge of kaolin deposits. The professor added that he could arrange the sale of it, if Jenifer so desired, and the letter ended with personalities.

The country about the store and gin and house had its share of canvassers, — strange men beginning to wonder if this unknown corner might have its usefulness, prospective buyers of cheap lands which might be turned to profit, hunters of lumber, crop speculators, sellers of fertilizers, chance peddlers, — so that it caused no surprise when a stranger hung about the cross-roads village for a day or two.

The astonishment began later with Mr. Cross.

"Mr. Cross," asked Jenifer, when the stranger had been gone a month, and the idle season of the store had come, "you said you wanted to give me some time off this summer?"

Mr. Cross's chair was tilted back against the counter and his hat pulled over his eyes. He seemed half-asleep, but in fact he was calculating intently some crop figures he had received that morning.

"Yes," he said lazily. "Yes, I do. You've been looking peaked lately, Jenifer; don't you feel well?"

"Never felt better."

"Well, want it now?"

"I — I think so."

A furrow of perplexity had beaten itself between Jenifer's brows. He was face to face with problems too great for him, and he had no intimates. The county, with its tangles of intermarriages and associations, assimilated new life slowly. Jenifer was still on trial before it; and his employer's good-will, which was genuine, showed itself chiefly in his chaffing.

Lately Mr. Cross had begun to wonder at Jenifer's abstraction and the perplexity which showed itself in the boy's face.

"Well, if you are not sure, neither am I," he said good-naturedly.

"I should like to get off for a little while," Jenifer admitted hesitantly.

"Now's your time. When do you want to go?"

"Next week."

"All right."

"Mr. Cross, could you spare me if — would it matter if I did not come back?"

"Name of wonder, Jenifer" — Mr. Cross brought his chair down straight — "what are you talking about?"

Jenifer fought the temptation to say "I don't know." There was not a stealthy streak in him. This thing had been done in secret because he feared he was playing the fool, and if he did his loss was sufficient penalty without the incessant chaffing about it which would last as long as he should live there. He knew too well the tenacity with which the store loungers held to their old jests, and he had seen too often the gray-headed man redden at the telling of a boyish prank. So he had dared for himself, with the knowledge of none about him.

Now he came out from the counter and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. It was past the noon, and blazing hot. There would be no customers before the cool of the evening and there was no chance that they would be disturbed.

"Mr. Cross," he began, "you know that land I bought from Jack Harrell?"

Mr. Cross was watching him. With the roundness worn from Jenifer's face the line of his cheek was long, the thrust of his chin more aggressive; and the look in his eyes was no longer careless.

"Yes, yes," said the older man shortly, as he puzzled. "But what you want with it the Lord only knows."

"I have sold it."

"What!" in open astonishment. "I didn't know

you had so much sense." But the tone was kindly. "What did you get for it?"

"I haven't quite closed the deal yet." Jenifer used the term smoothly enough to show how often it had been in his mind.

"How much have you been offered?"

"Two hundred thousand dollars."

"You lie." Mr. Cross sprang to his feet. He gripped Jenifer's shoulder.

"No," Jenifer's glance showed a gleam of amusement, "no, I do not."

"Come over here by the door," holding him where the blaze of the sun beat on them both. "What did you find on it?" instantly divining the cause of such value.

"It's too hot here. Sit down again. I want to tell you."

"What was it?" Mr. Cross insisted peremptorily. "Lord," he interjaculated between Jenifer's quick sentences. "Those old sloughs! I never dreamed of them. What fools we have been. And you — Go on." Mr. Cross clenched his hands behind him. His eyes blazed. He strode up and down the worn floor of the store.

Jenifer leaned against the counter. His face was blanched, but his speech was deliberate; and he told every circumstance, Mr. Cross's ejaculations breaking in upon his words.

The employer was a man who believed unfalteringly in his State. With keen business instincts he had been content to pick up the threads his own father had left



with loose and flying ends, and to weave them into a fortune. His cotton-fields had prospered when his neighbors vowed they could meet neither meat nor fertilizer bill. He was trying a new venture of peanut cultivation in his light fields, and succeeding with it. His gin supplied the needs of the neighborhood — and his own pockets. His store brought moderate returns. His speculations were generally safe. He was in touch with every experiment in the State, and one of the staunchest upholders in her possibilities. Here was an object-lesson, and with a vengeance.

The boy brought by him to their county had laid hands upon their unguessed treasure. Still, he was great enough, and just and kind enough, to see Jenifer's side, to listen, encourage, and advise.

"I tell you, Jenifer," he ended, "they sha'n't do you. Say you are going to meet the agent in Norfolk this week? Well, I'm going up too. No, don't thank me. You have done your work here, and done it well. And I hoped — I thought you were going to settle down amongst us.

"Do you want me to tell this?" he asked abruptly.

"No, not till it is put through, till the thing is finished."

"I see. But —" the older man began to question, the younger to answer. Again they went over the matter in every detail. Mr. Cross stood motionless in the door when the story was finished.

There was the hot sandy road, there the gin — its doors closed till the new crops should fill it; and the heavy greenness of summer was on the swamp. The man went back over his hard fight and toil, and weighed

what he had won. So some men measure lives, counting neither joy of living, nor guerdon of dawn and light of stars and summer's ecstasy and winter's night, neither the rapture of love, nor the bliss of hope fulfilled, — nothing but the sum of their possessions. Only in finer moments, and few, do they grasp the breadth, the height, the depth of that full life which is every man's meed.

Still, this man was generous enough to feel no envy, even when he measured by such standards. "Tell you what, Jenifer," he advised, speaking slowly, "such things will leak out somehow; wonder this hasn't done so already; and — and it's hard on Jack," he said suddenly, with a keen look at Jenifer. But the young man did not see it. He was too bewildered with the whirl of thought and a guess at what lay before him. "I can spare you. You had better go right along. What day are you to be there? Tuesday? And this is Friday. Better go right up; and I will meet you there. Yes, I am going to see this thing through. Can you catch the train? All right."

Since the cars had brought Jenifer down he had been no further on them than around to the little post-office. The cotton had been white with bursting pods when he came. He looked at it from the narrow window of the coach, and it looked now like row upon row of gay colored hollyhocks. Behind him the gray clustered buildings, the liveoak tops, and the green swamp slid from sight.

The rest was so easy it seemed impossible.

There came a day when Jenifer sat on a wharf of

the city and wondered what he should do with himself.

A bank had always been, in his mind, a place where money grows, and he had handed his check through a bank window with an absolute faith in the safety of such planting, a trust which was not betrayed. When he thought of it at all he felt a happy consciousness of the fruitage which would grow upon it; but the sum of his feelings was a sense of liberty.

He was free! That strife for daily bread, that struggle for the beginnings of prosperity, that wonder as to his ability to earn such, which every man must feel, was done away with. Jenifer could do as he chose.

In his heart was bursting into bloom the dream which had fed his fancy when the teacher's pointer trailed across the map, and the strange sounding names of distant lands and vast seas and old cities broke on the drowsy air. That growing fancy made the fascination of the wharves.

For the city, with its hot streets and close cafés and crowded counters, he cared not at all; but the wide water with its far shore of hazy blue, the bending of white sails to the breeze, the ruffle of wind upon the mighty river! And the cotton bales piled behind him, the stretches of peanut sacks roof high, the smell of resin, and of the sea!

Sitting thus, his soft hat low over his shining eyes and his idle feet dangling above the lapping tide, the sail of a ship slid close beside him. Jenifer looked up and laughed at the quizzical glances of the men upon the deck and at the sails which flapped above him.

"Hi, there," a sailor shouted. "Look out! Get to work!" as he flung a coil of rope upon the wharf. "Make fast!" The sails were rattling upon the deck.

"Say, what are you doing there anyhow?" called another as he worked. "Look lazy enough!"

Jenifer answered in kind. He had flung the coil about the pile, and the coastwise ship scraped against the heavy wharf. He stood erect and strong, his hands upon his straight hips, and called back to them, and the captain, with a careless measurement of the young man's good-nature and his idleness, flung out a jest.

"Want to go along?" he asked as he sprang ashore.

"Where?"

"Lord only knows. Charleston first; then anywhere."

"When do you sail?"

"To-day. Going?"

"Yes," with Jenifer's aptitude for instant decision.

The captain began a more careful category. It was a small ship and built for work. No passenger had ever bunked in her narrow cabin. Yet the impulse which had prompted her owner impelled an easy arrangement with Jenifer. When the ship slipped out between the capes he stood upon her deck.

By daybreak the land was a blur behind them; and before him the blue, with that deep line of sapphire swinging on its far curve, that line which bewitches and promises and beckons, pressing into its service even the waves as they run singing by the ship and setting them to whisper: "Over, beyond; over, beyond."

Far they pursued it. Often it was hidden. Long lines of sandy reefs, where the wind tossed the dunes

into fantastic shapes, cut between them and that sapphire sorcerer; wooded banks of deep rivers shut them in; islands where the palms cast stiff shadows lay between them and that witching blue; but ever, when the ship was free of them, there it swung, and they pursued.

When Jenifer landed again in Norfolk he had been gone two years.

### III

HE was sunburned and sinewy. All his roundness had been burned and worked away. His gray eyes were both keen and dreamy; his black hair was reddened beneath his cap.

It took some trouble to prove his identity at the bank, and he found that his money tree had borne him harvest. His royalties — they were Mr. Cross's provision — had come in slowly the first year, better and faster every month of the next, and they told the success of the unequalled find. But Jenifer had no desire to go clanking down the half hundred miles which lay between to see how curiously the new rough laid line — private property of the company, switching on, by rights for which it paid dearly, to the old rails across the cotton-fields — cut into the heart of the silent woods.

It seemed to him shut away forever. The other part of his life was not yet begun and the zest of it was eating into his heart.

No branch of that tree whose roots were in the bank's vaults must be broken; but its fruit could be gathered freely, and with that in his pockets Jenifer turned northwards.

The South admits three capitals, — Richmond, of the finest country beneath the flag, New York, of the



entire Americas, Paris, of the world. But Jenifer had been bred apart. He knew no affiliations. His mind turned to the nearest city; and in less than a month he was in Baltimore.

He reached the city at Christmas time. Those months of slipping along the edges of the world had intensified every aptitude for delight, and his ease of mind, the freedom of his outlook, the newness and freshness of the world he fell upon made him forget his alien estate.

The misty mornings when the shop lights shone out into the fog; the heaps of holly at the corners of the streets; the fakirs who lined the curbs; the venders of crinkly strands of silver and gold to trail upon the Christmas tree; the slow moving of close pressed figures, like swaying sombre flowers;—these Jenifer saw.

He filled his pockets with toffee at the market stalls. He treated the beggars up and down the street. He bought till the fakirs hailed his tall figure, his leisurely look, and his kindly eyes across the crowd. He had no knowledge of fees or tips, but at the hotel, a square or two away, bell-boys and waiters were keen to wait upon him. They kept, all of them, hoards of trifles which they could freely give on that day which offsets the sway of winter. They never knew what was coming out of Jenifer's pockets, nor on whom it might be bestowed. Half-way up the corridor to his room the young man's store was usually depleted.

The days were shorter. Longer were the morning fogs and earlier in the evening they drifted through

the ways, hiding the tall cornices and massing the corners of the streets. The light showed pale and golden through the mists. The holly was piled higher. The fakirs strung down the narrow street and far along its crossings. The market was ablaze, its corners piled with cedar, spruce, and pine. It was Christmas eve; and Jenifer, abroad, lived a strange night.

"Goin' out, sah?" asked the waiter, as Jenifer pushed back his chair. "'Deed you bettah had. Times hyar in de street dis night. Lawd-ee, you nebbah seen nothin' like 'em. Dat's a fac'. Git yo'se'f a bell, sah, an' a horn good and strong; an' de bell mus' be a cowbell wid a string."

"What in the name of mischief would I do with them?"

"You'll see, sah." Ben's mouth was one wide grin. "You'll l'arn soon ernough. You ain't gwine stay in ter-night?" he asked anxiously. The negro had been waiting on Jenifer, attaching himself to the young man more and more since the day he entered the house; and Ben had his own good reasons for doing so. "You ain't gwine stay in?" he repeated.

"I certainly shall not."

"Den you bettah git raidy good. Ise gwine be on han' myse'f," he chuckled.

Jenifer stood with his hand on his chair. He had come in late — he could never bear the crowd and clatter at its height — and the room was nearly empty. In this corner, which he had first chosen, there was no one near him and the friendly negro.

"Boss," Ben cautioned, "ef you ain't done heard

nothin' 'bout ter-night, an' you aint nebbah been hyar befo' — ”

Jenifer's "Never was here a day before in my life," was a trifle curt.

"Den you do as I tells you. You goes to the theatre. Wish I could go myse'f. Thank you, sah; thank you. Chris'mas gif' sho ernough. Ise gwine now suttin. You puts a bell in yo' pocket — ”

"I'm no cow," Jenifer interjected. He was both amused and impatient.

"Lawd-ee. De cowbell's what you want though. An' — ”

"Go along; attend to your work," warned Jenifer good-naturedly.

"Well, you go to the theatre first," Ben followed to say. "De fun don't begin till 'long 'bout de time de show lets out. An' you'll see, or my name's not Ben," the negro chattered. But Jenifer was out of the room.

"Lawd," said the negro as he piled the dishes, "it does me good to see him eat. No foolin' wid de vittles an' mixin' 'em up an' callin' for outlandish things; but jes like he's hongry, an' de things tas'e good. Ise gwine look fer him on de street sho', an' he'll be dyar. Den he'll see."

Jenifer, coming down the theatre steps, found himself in a sea of people and going with the tide. So closely they pressed that the plume of a woman's hat brushed his cheek, and as far as he could see under the lamp-posts and by the arc lights which crisscrossed their white beams across the way, the human wave spread.

Onward to the corner it bore him, and down the street where carnival reigned from curb to curb.

The cars were jammed helplessly back on the cross streets; and down the bed of the thoroughfare, with bells clanging against the cobbles, with blaring horns, and balls and candies tossed from hand to hand, surged the throng, till it came to a far intersecting street, where suddenly were silence and emptiness and long lines of light upon deserted ways.

Back again, through press and furious fun, to the market sheds. Bands joined forces; friends fell in behind those they knew; strangers banded together for the fray; and Jenifer was in the thick of it.

"You got dat bell?" Ben shouted as he passed. The horn at his own black lips was like a megaphone. "An' dat horn? Lawd-ee, keep erway from hyar." Jenifer had blown a blast in the negro's ear, and he showered Ben with tinsel till the negro's shoulders glittered like a Christmas bush. "I'll gib you a tas'e o' dis ef you don't, an' de Lawd knows dis will blow yo' hat clean off yo' haid, an' yo' hair 'long wid it."

But the crowd had parted them. Ben was jammed against a store window; Jenifer was in the middle of the street.

"Hi, dyar, jes look at dat," Ben chuckled when next they met. A girl had slipped on some of the stuff with which the street was strewn, and Jenifer caught her with his arm.

She was a pretty girl, tall and slender, with hair too exaggerated with fluffiness, and hat too large and elaborate of plumage; but her eyes were big and blue,

her teeth white, and she seemed filled with the spirit of the hour. She shrieked her thanks at Jenifer. The man and woman with her closed around them and swept Jenifer on with their crowd.

Ben dropped the megaphone from his lips.

“Boss,” said Ben, when they stumbled upon one another near the hotel door — it was long past the midnight — “Boss, dat sho was fine.”

“It was that. Here, take this.” Jenifer paused in the empty hall to fling to the negro the horn and bell and bags of glittering sweets. “Lord, look at me,” he cried, as he caught sight of himself in the long mirror he passed.

Shoulders and coat were covered with flour; his cheeks were streaked, his hat awry; but his eyes were glowing, and, tired as he was, he was ready to laugh at the sight the glass gave back.

“Jes gib yo’ coat an’ hat hyar, an’ go ’long to baid. I’ll tend to ’em.” Jenifer slipped his arms from his coat, and stretched them above his head. “Whew, but I’m tired!”

“’Spec’ you is, all dat cavortin’ I seen you a-doin’.”

“Did some yourself, didn’t you?” Jenifer leaned over the banister to ask.

“’Deed I did.” Ben started down the corridor, but looked back at the tall figure with bent head and sleepy eyes.

When Jenifer had appeared at the house, his absolute way of doing just as he chose and his total unconsciousness of any difference or of any reason for fashioning

himself after a fancied model, had aroused the amusement of the servants. His large-heartedness had changed that amusement to something which bore a strong tinge of respect, but there was an uncertainty as to what the young man would next do.

Ben, with the hilarity of the hour, called up, "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," Jenifer echoed with a laugh.

But the words, as a recurrent date may, set him thinking. Jenifer saw, as he flung off his clothes and long after his head was on his pillow, deep woods and green moss underfoot, and overhead bare branches with entangled mistletoe; and he heard, instead of the roll of belated wagon wheels and the smooth sliding of cars along steel rails, the deep swift rush of the Chowan, with the ripples of its swirl about the cypress. He saw blue and distant harbors, the reaches of still, tropic seas; — and while they and all that he could remember were, in his mind, continuous, he seemed himself to stand apart from them and the future alike.

He had not feared when the bar was put up across the fold of school and he was outside; he had felt no misgiving concerning a strange country and people; the last two years had been ecstatically satisfying: now, on what he termed to himself a lark, Jenifer was suddenly uncertain and the future lacked radiance.



## IV

THAT Christmas was the loneliest day Jenifer had ever known. The church bells had ceased ringing when he came down. Ben waited.

"Lawd, boss, you might as well have stayed erway tel dinnah." The hilarity of the Christmas greeting at midnight was now dead. "We's gwine hab dinnah good an' early, an' gib de darkeys a chance; yes, sah. An' 'tis gwine be a dinnah sho, — blue p'int, an' tukkey stuffed chock-a-block wid iystahs, an' — Say, boss, you bettah hab some iystahs now, an' a cup o' coffee an' a roll. Save yo' appetite.

"Too late fer chu'ch," he warned, as Jenifer pushed back his chair.

So he was, but he thought to try the streets whose glitter had fascinated him. He walked to the familiar corner — desolation! Glittering strands and broken baubles! Holly trodden underfoot, bruised pine and spruce! His room was Jenifer's only refuge.

There he took to what he seldom did — reading the morning's papers. But the men who shaped the stuff the printers set in type were like the rest of the world. They had blown the bubble from their draught, and now the cup was stale.

Jenifer turned at last in sheer weariness to the ad-

vertisements, — well spaced items of local stores, terse sentences of lesser matters, and that column of temptations which sets the reader dreaming of acres and houses and the thrill of land possession.

Down it he went with genuine interest and hit upon an item that meant nothing to him till at the end he came upon a name. Then he sprang to his feet, dashed the paper from him, and strode up and down the room.

He stooped for the sheet, re-read it and flung it again from him, and again took up his uncertain march. The face reflected in the long glass was white, the gray eyes blazing, the straight figure tenuous. His strong hands were clenched in his pockets.

It was possible, — that was his first thought. It should be, — and instantly. Then Jenifer was running down the stair, out to that office on which no occasion shuts the door and from which his message clicked.

It might be holiday but he would not wait. It was feast-day but he would find his man. The message sent, Jenifer was off tramping the streets where life hummed yesterday and to-day scarce a wagon rolled, till the time for a possible answer should have passed.

When he came back he was white for fear the thing he, in one swift second, had set his whole heart on was not possible, or, what would have then been worse, that waiting was before him. But the clerk held out a strip.

The written scrawl trembled in Jenifer's fingers, blurring before him. The clerk, idle and good-natured, and necessarily a confidant, laughed at his fear.

"You've got it all right," he said carelessly.

"Yes." Jenifer's lips were stiff, his voice hoarse.

"Sort of a Christmas present?"

Jenifer looked down at him, startled at the question. He had never had a Christmas present. "Yes," — his voice easier, — "a Christmas gift. To myself," he added when he was on the street.

His! The old place, the columned porch with floor of patterned brick where mosses peeped; the marble steps and wide high hall; the stair with stately curve; the great rooms and deep hearths; the yard; the flower bordered garden; the arcaded quarters; the roll of hills and slope of fields and running streams; the vision of mountains crowding close; — his! And beyond the wood which bordered them was the cabin in which he had been born.

## V

THE wind that night changed suddenly. By midnight it was singing down the streets, and dawn was brilliantly cold. Jenifer, fresh from hot countries, felt as if he were freezing. He was wearing before dark a heavy coat with collar turned up about his ears and soft black hat pulled down to meet his collar. His finger tips were stiff.

"I shall have to buy a pair of gloves," he said to himself as he shivered on the street. He laughed at the idea, but turned into a department store whose glittering windows were by his side.

The suavity of the floor-walker who met him was bewildering. "Gloves, sir; certainly, sir. This way! Miss Alice, show this gentleman some gloves. Walking? Driving?" as Jenifer stood red and dumb. "She will find whatever you want." Jenifer was left grasping at a counter across which a young woman gazed at him from beneath bewildering fluffs of hair; and down and away and across, women and lights, lights and women.

The girl looked at him curiously, then at the brown hand gripping the counter's edge. "Eights, I think will fit," she declared, turning for the boxes.

At the voice Jenifer started. He was startled into observation of the face before him. The high piled

hair and the big blue eyes were those of the young woman who had shared his carnival fun; but the color was gone out of her cheeks, and her eyes were, or had been, listless.

"You had better sit down," she said, laughing at his surprise. "I can fit you better. So!" She measured his knuckles deftly, each touch of her fingers signalling fresh confusion in Jenifer's mind, and before the young man, bewildered by soft pats upon his hardened hands, had an idea of what she meant to do, she was slipping the gloves upon his fingers.

His stammering protest passed unheeded. The young woman was enjoying his confusion, and the admiration in his astonished eyes was like wine. The other clerks had drawn away, whispering and laughing.

She put a glove upon one of his hands, that were suddenly hot, snapped it at the wrist, and then leaned, talking to him familiarly as the cash-box slid along its little rail.

"That certainly was a good time we had the other night," she said, pushing the box before her about the shining counter. "Best time I ever had in my life. But I am certainly tired now."

The man's quick sympathy was stirred. The white cheeks and the lines about the young woman's mouth bespoke the truthfulness of her complaint; and she said nothing of the late dance of the night before, which had sapped the strength that might have gone to the work of the day.

"What time is it? Time to be closing, thank goodness. But I might have known it," she added with a

laugh and a significant look from a figure loitering by the door to the young woman nearest her. "Here's your change."

Jenifer saw a man sauntering up and down the street, and, in idleness, took to watching him. In a quarter of an hour the clerks were pouring out of the stores. Back in a corner by a window the man whom Jenifer watched waited till a red plume waved across the crowd, and the man's hat was soon beside it.

Jenifer understood and was laughing at the knowledge, when a voice spoke in his ear. It said only "Good evening," but its demureness was dangerous. Before she spoke Alice had detached herself from a girl who clung to her, and she made it appear that the surge of the crowd had drifted her beside him.

"Looks like the other night," she said with a laugh.

"It certainly does. Only there is not so much fun. Are you going home?"

"Yes, I'll be glad when I get there," with a quick droop of her fair head.

"Which is your car?" asked Jenifer suddenly. He thought the tired woman had best hasten.

"This," said Alice shortly, pushing forward.

"Let me put you on it."

Jenifer easily made way for her. She felt his strong hand under her elbow, lifting her up; but if she looked for anything more she was disappointed. The crowded car was off, and Jenifer was not aboard.

But it happened that he was at that corner the next evening. The closing of the shops was a new phase to him. The crowd that thronged the streets all day was



gone. In its stead were tired women and hurrying men and shrill, pathetic children. The white arc lights made their faces wan; the shadows of the wires swayed across the narrow street; high up the windows blazed; and the stars in that slip of heaven above the brick paled before the flashing lights. The things they stand for might have been forgotten; steadfastness and hope and eternity seemed impossible; strife and rush and press, reality.

Jenifer was aware only of the friendly jostling, the street calls, and the keen air which made haste imperative. A newsboy pressed against him; a white-faced, hoarse-voiced boy sheltered a stand of red carnations with a tired arm; the crowd jammed closer; and some one, with a voice which hinted of laughter, spoke at his side.

Jenifer had not waited for it, but his pleasure was distinct. "Big crowd, isn't it?" he asked lightly, as he looked back at Alice Mason's face.

"Yes, I don't see how I am to make the car." She pouted alluringly as she spoke.

"Oh, that is easy enough." Jenifer started to clear a way.

"I am not in such an awful hurry. That car is full already. I'm going to wait for the next. I don't want to stand up, heaven knows. I have had enough of that all day."

Jenifer's eyes darkened with pity. His face was keen and kind, and the girl, with a quick glance to see that none heard, spoke graphically of her trials. Few men listen to such sentences untouched. They know

and see the signs of physical frailty. Pit that inequality against man's strength, and will alone enables the woman to brave it. Jenifer saw the drooping mouth and the white cheeks the wind had but begun to beat a glow upon, and felt half-ashamed of his magnificent untiredness.

The boy with his flowers had pressed nearer, and the smell of them stole up to Alice as he talked. "How pretty they are, and sweet!" she exclaimed.

Jenifer turned. A little sheaf of red nodded over the side of the brown jar.

"You love flowers?" he asked quickly.

The girl, seeing what was coming, nodded delightedly.

When she got in the car and walked up the aisle, carrying the sheaf proudly on her arm, a fellow worker mischievously hummed a bar beneath her breath. It was one to which many, happy, afraid, or merely curious, have listened, and to which children have set simple words. The first of these are: "Here comes the bride."

Color flared suddenly in Alice's cheeks. She gazed steadily out into the night. Her blue eyes were hard and her breath quick, as she thought.

When Jenifer helped her again on the car she slipped a card into his hand. "Come and see me sometime," she said; and Jenifer, used to the easy way of folk who have always known one another, was delighted with what he thought a show of friendliness amidst the repelling reserve of a big city.

He waited a day or two before he went, and some feeling kept him away from that crowded corner. Then,

too, he had found other things to interest him. The wires had settled his purchase, but letters had been necessary and their tenor had unfolded to him possibilities sufficient for every thought.

It never occurred to Jenifer to go himself to settle the affair, though a scant hundred and sixty miles intervened. But there are people, and some of them the strongest, who could not give a motive for their deeds and yet live wisely. It may be that the inner leading of a pure and wholesome mind is better than analysis.

The old estate which Jenifer had bought had come down into the hands of a child who was an orphan; and the one regard of his caretakers seemed to be to settle a lump sum on the boy. That meant that Jenifer had bought not only houses and acres, but all the buildings held. Who cared for musty books and tarnished brass and peeling veneer and dim portraits? Not they! Nor did Jenifer, at first. He was wondering what he should do with them.

Besides, the air had softened, the sky thickened and darkened till clouds rolled from rim to rim; and their fleeciness had compressed to hard gray folds without a shadow between. Sitting in his room and half-asleep, Jenifer heard the hissing of the snow as it struck that night upon his window-pane.

In the morning the wires swayed beneath its weight. Cornices and window-frames were crowded with white featheriness which clung to the walls like hoary eyebrows upon a man's dark face; and from wall to wall the way lay white. Ben was ready with advice.

"Boss," he said, as he hovered around Jenifer at his small table in the far corner, "dis is de day fer a sleigh-ride sho."

Jenifer's gray eyes, which showed often blue or black, according to his mood, looked suddenly blue with a glint of amusement at Ben's enthusiasm.

"You nebbah did see nothin' like it, de way 'twill look out in de park dis mornin'. I used to drike myse'f, an' I knows. An' dat's de thing I likes to do, but seem like — Well, I'm a-tryin' my han' at dis now. A sleigh-ride," the negro added slyly, "it suttently do cos' a lot."

"How much?" Jenifer looked up to ask carelessly.

Ben stood still and straight, a cover in his hands; his big eyes were black and fathomless. "Ten dollahs an hour, sah," he declared impressively. Suddenly his eyes flashed; his big mouth opened for a wide grin. "Gwine to try it? You is? I knows de very hosses you wants. Jes let me git 'em. Ten o'clock? All right, sah. I'll hab a little time off 'bout den."

Ben took time to bring up the team himself, — prancing horses and jingling bells and black buffalo robes, — and before them the long line of the snow-filled street. He stood knee-deep in the drift beside the curb.

"Lawd, but I envies you," he said wistfully.

"Want to go?" asked Jenifer lightly, as he folded the robes about his knees.

"Want to? Say, boss, does you know how to drike?"

Jenifer threw back his head and laughed. Poor as he

had been born and bred in a crowd, he had yet learned a horse and his ways as he had learned to breathe. He handled the reins lovingly in his strong fingers.

"I see you does. But many a gemman jes takes a niggah 'long fer looks. An' you looks fine," wheedled Ben.

"Can you get off?" Jenifer hesitated.

"Good Gawd, boss, what's to stop me? Ef dat man" — nodding to the hotel behind him — "gits mad, an' I loses my job, can't I git anuddah? An' I can't git a sleigh-ride ebry day. You think I'm gwine ax anybody wheddah I can go or not?"

"Here, hold the horses a minute." Jenifer sprang out, ran into the office, and in a second was back again. "Jump in," he said shortly; and the horses, impatient of restraint, were off.

Ben's enthusiasm struck a spark from Jenifer's calm acceptance. The negro knew furred drivers and racing horses, and it was his bubbling talk of them which made Jenifer say, with a diffidence which denied a trace of the braggart, "I have a place of my own up in the country."

"Farm? Good Gawd, boss, you don't say so?"

"Good place for horses, too," added Jenifer.

"Does you raise 'em? Is you gwine try 'em up dyar?"

Jenifer was looking straight before him. Cedar and spruce stood black against the hill; a lake sparkled at his side; and over it rang loudly the music of his bells.

"Is you gwine lib dyar?" the negro insisted.

He asked the questions which had slumbered under the surface of Jenifer's careless heyday. "I think so; some day," he answered slowly.

Ben leaned to peer into Jenifer's face. The young man's eyes were dark and narrow. The few careless words he had spoken had called a flush to his face redder than that which the cold had fanned upon his cheek. Yes, he said to himself, he would do it. "Live there! live there!" the horses' hoofs beat it, the runners sang it, and, as they topped the hill and the roll of land was before them, Jenifer felt as if all the world were his.

He raised himself and shouted to the horses as they raced the slope; and Ben's laugh was louder than Jenifer's voice.

Still the negro was not done with that matter of farm and horses. "Boss," he asked, when time and distance had sobered them, "don't you want a niggah on dat place? Dyar's plenty dyar, I know; but don't you want *me*?"

Jenifer shifted the reins and turned to look the negro squarely in the eyes. "Ever live in the country?" he asked succinctly.

"Bohn dyar."

"What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I got erway somehow. I — Ise twice as good erroun' a stable as I is anywhars else."

"What did you leave it for then?"

"Well, me an' de man I wukked fer, we fell out." Ben fidgeted. "Wanted me to hitch up a hoss some man had been dribin' half a day, an' de hoss still pantin'.



I wouldn't do it. An' so — an' so I jes took up the nex' thing what come handy."

"There's nobody on the place now," said Jenifer reflectively.

"How much lan' is in it?"

"Six hundred acres."

"An' houses, too?"

"Of course!" Jenifer was impatient at unwarranted questioning.

"All shet up? Now ain't dat a shame! An' dyar's some people hyar, an' I knows 'em, dat don't know whar dey'll sleep when night comes erroun'."

"I can't help that." Jenifer was tired of the talk. He flicked the lagging nag to keep her up with the leader.

"Yes, you can." Ben was in clear good-nature. "You can take one niggah out dis town. An' you's gwine do it, 'long 'bout spring-time now?"

Jenifer's laugh carried all the assurance Ben needed.

## VI

As it happened Jenifer relieved the city's population of another; even of a third.

The second was due to Ben's bragging.

Jenifer had foregathered in the lobby and on the street corners with a young man whose attraction lay in a surface good-fellowship and a caustic knowledge of the city's ways. It was this man to whom Ben's bragging spread.

He approached Jenifer with some careless reference to the negro's talk, but Jenifer's reticence held his questioner at bay. Still the stranger was interested; and it is hard for a man who does not know how to lie to fend. If Jenifer had one gift beyond all others it was truth-telling. The emblazonment and broidery of speech were impossible to him, but, once cornered, once made to talk he did so with such clearness and distinctness of term and expression that the words formed for the hearer a sunlit picture and he saw the thing of which Jenifer talked; but Jenifer was too young and too unknowing to use his taciturn habit as a shield to guard himself.

When the young man — he was an illustrator on one of the city dailies, and a maker of sketches sometimes better than those his sheet desired — had finally

found out all he wanted to know and understood more than did Jenifer himself he startled the visitor.

"Jenifer," he said, "you will want that old place fixed up. You want it done right. Of course you do."

Jenifer was in the lobby lounging against one of the pillars. He squared his shoulders in his surprise. Merely to own it and to live in it — that old place — had seemed enough.

"Man," added the artist querulously, "you've got a chance not one in a thousand gets. You don't deserve it."

Jenifer had not asked himself if he did. He had it; that was sufficient.

"Many a man would be crazy over such an opportunity. This historic old place — It is historic?"

His listener's mind whirled with a sudden recollection of its legends. They had been forgotten till now.

"Just so. To remember its past, to bring the place into shape, into keeping with its present — I'd like to do it." The artist spoke carelessly, but his glance at Jenifer was keen.

"Tell you what it is, Jenifer," he went on in quick undertone, "I'm sick of it, all this, what you have seen, and now — God! You don't know the beginning. I feel — Sometimes another day of it seems impossible. There is something, a dream, a fantasy, call it what you please, — something I am crazed to be about, to try. It would count, if I could. I know it. And I am bound to this cursed work. It bleeds me of every minute. I've got to keep at it for bread."

Wheatham brought his heel down sharply on the marble floor. His forehead was furrowed and the sweat stood thick on it. "If I could get away, cut loose, make enough to live on while I could — could work at that — God! for time! And every day it seems to fade from me because I can't begin on it; to grow dim. Some day it will be gone." It was early, no one else in the lobby, and Wheatham was striding up and down the floor. Jenifer caught but a word now and then. "And I — I shall be useless. I shall never get the grip of it again or of anything."

Jenifer caught him by the arm, linked his own through it, though Jenifer's height made his leaning towards the other seem absurd. "Come up to my room and talk it over," he said.

As a result the artist, a week later, was on his way towards the mountains. Snow-drifts and red clay might well have dampened his ardor, but on his return he had enough to fire his speech. He should have talked of the house which he had gone to consider, but the mountain tops, the haze upon their whiteness, and their majestic sweep were his refrain.

"Beautiful old stairway, and from the landing —" Wheatham shook his head. He could not describe it, that wide window and the world beyond it. "Miles of misty hills, as if the great folds of them were wrinkled against the sky," he added dreamily.

Wheatham had fallen into the habit of haunting Jenifer's room, and there, as they sat, — both smoked generally, — he talked incessantly. The man had kept

the better part of himself cramped so long that now, as it pushed forth from repression, it swept him from his caustic self-control.

Jenifer listened with scarce a word to interrupt. Now and then his eyes darkened, or the lines were tense about his mouth; and in his silence and his aptitude for quick decision the artist began to recognize a strength.

"Man," Wheatham threw in, staccato fashion, "it must be something to sit by the blazing fire there on a winter's night, and hear the wind howling across those hills, and searching one's soul. A man must be satisfied with himself—at peace with himself—or he could not face it out. Lord, it needs a crowd and noise to make one forget his nothingness. If ever it were proven that the majority of great men were country bred, it would be that—that—What is it? that being face to face with the knowledge of the thing you ought to be."

Wheatham knew what he was talking about. The night he camped in that disused house and built his fire he could not have endured it but for that dream of creation in his soul and the divine hope of mounting higher than his plodding had yet admitted. The dream he held warm pricked now at the fine web of fret and work which had enmeshed it; and he could see, here in this room, patterned like a hundred of its kind and stiff and unbeautiful, the place in those hills where he would house himself, and live and wait and dream, with the sun on the peaks and the haze in the hollows, for inspiration; and work slowly and as he chose, till,

little by little, the thought born of his best should grow and be perfected.

In Jenifer's mind the wonder of possession grew, and the passion of it.

Their talk beat always about the old house amongst the hills. "Tell you what, Jenifer," exclaimed Wheatham abruptly, "you don't want any new stuff in that house. You are to leave it to me, if I understand the bargain." But Wheatham flushed. The compact had been of his own making. He had not forgotten that he had fairly forced it upon Jenifer. "You are going to leave it to me?"

"Of course. That is the bargain."

Wheatham flung himself across a chair, his arms on the straight back, his face thrust forward eagerly. "You have never told me what I could do, or just what you want. How much money are you going to spend on it?"

"Oh!" Jenifer grasped the tangible thought. The evening paper, with one of Wheatham's cartoons staring from the page, lay on the table. Jenifer pulled it to him, and began making figures on the margin. He treated his money tree fairly. It was hard and fast in mind that no root of it should be disturbed, nor had they been; and while this present humor of his lasted he wanted plenty for himself. In a second he knew how many dollars of his could go towards this latest whim. It was no fabulous sum, but enough.

Wheatham laughed, when it was named, from sheer delight at thinking of it, — the old home, its possibilities, and his the power to bring them out.



"But out of that must come your own pay," warned Jenifer.

Wheatham reddened. "I know. It is enough. When do you want it finished?" he asked suddenly.

Jenifer clasped his hands behind his head. "I don't know," he answered dreamily. It waited, the thing he most desired; but he was not ready for it. Something intervened. He had no idea what. "Take your own time," he ended lightly.

Meanwhile there was something in Jenifer's life which Wheatham and Ben alike resented. Few of the evenings found him about the lobby or in his room, and they knew where he had gone; — theatre, supper, often at some place of questionable reputation and always with the same companion. They knew the woman must have instigated such gaieties. The man had not before heard of their existence.

It had been hard for Jenifer to make up his mind for that first call. He waited a week before he sought out the number on the card Alice had given him and found it.

The young woman had been first disappointed and then provoked at Jenifer's disappearance. When at her young sister's "A man to see you, and he's a stranger, — and he didn't say a word about his name," she powdered and fluffed and elaborated, and came tripping down the narrow stair, her surprise put to flight, for an instant, her pouting; and the admiration, which she was quick to see in Jenifer's eyes, and the wonder with which he listened to her frivolities, appeased her.

Jenifer thought her marvellous: slender and tall, with fingers and body that never rested, but emphasized the trip of light words from her tongue — How could she talk so easily, say so many words, throw such changes of inflection into her voice, so sway and lean and straighten, and after all say nothing with a gist of meaning?

It was wonderful; it was intensely amusing. No glittering play of Eastern beads in swarthy hands ever more surely charmed the gazer.

Who was to warn him? Wheatham went the length of finding out what manner of woman Alice Mason was and groaned at the knowledge. The things that could be said against her were only negations, but she was not Jenifer's sort. Still, what was his kind? Wheatham had but a chance acquaintanceship and the knowledge of the charge Jenifer had given him. Yet the far-seeing part of him forbade the union of Jenifer's name with hers, even in thought.

The negro, too, with that dexterous skill which finds and grasps the personalities of those they serve, rebelled.

"Boss," he hinted one day, "dyar's some mighty pretty ummuns in dis town."

Jenifer was fastening his tie before the mirror. He had bought good clothes, — it was one of the first things he had attended to, — but he wore them carelessly. There was not a trace of the dandy about him. If something of aloofness, of his silent questioning of humanity, of his young, alert, yet calm expectancy had not laid its mark upon him, he would have gone unnoticed.

"Lawd," cried Ben, his fingers itching as he watched Jenifer's carelessness, "you ain't got dat knot eben 'spectable. Lemme fix it. Dyar, ef you'll jes let de en's fly out, an' stick a flowah in yo' buttonhole — Why don't you now?" he wheedled. "'Tis jes de time de pretty girls is out; an' dey's hyar, thick as bees in flowah time, an' as pretty as de blossoms, an' sweet — Lawd-ee!" Ben slipped behind Jenifer, and gave one quick look over the broad shoulder at the young man's reflected face.

Jenifer was amused, but at Ben.

"I goes myse'f sometimes 'long whar Ise gwine see 'em de mos'. Sech little feet a-trapsin' 'long, an' ruffles peepin' out, an' coat sort o' flung open —" Ben, unconsciously, was doing the promenade act to a finish. He flopped out his dingy vest to simulate the dainty blouses. "An' de rosy cheeks an' de bright eyes an' —" Ben collapsed. His smirk was too far behind the gay graciousness of expression which he recalled, and he had seen his own face as he pranced by the mirror.

"I suttently should try it," he insisted, prolonging the time of his errand unconscionably and desperately anxious to divert Jenifer's interest from the woman who was absorbing it. "Mebbe — mebbe you mought scrape a 'quaintance. Dyar's no telling," he added knowingly.

"But, boss," he warned solemnly, "ef ebbah you tries anything like dat, fotch de right one. I tell you it makes a heap o' diffrence who a man — a man sort o' trots wid. Ebry pair has got to moderate dyar paces to one anuddah to mek things go smooth an' eben; an'

you wants a good pardnah on de uddah side de pole ebry time, wheddah 'tis a spin in de park, or a long trot on de road, or a good long pull fer bus'ness.

"An' I knows one thing fer suttin," he added reflectively, "ef I was a hoss an' had my say in de mattah — an' a man he has when he's a-hitchin' up — I'd look to de p'int's o' de one dey buckled me wid. I would fer a fac', sho."

Ben's hints were unheeded. Jenifer had not even an idea that his doings were of moment to any one. He thought he was seeing the city in a new light, as he was; that he had an excellent guide, as he had; that there was no way of pleasure more harmless, but he should have asked himself the significance of that final word.

For if he did not know the way he trended, the woman did. Jenifer took to lounging in at the store to make new appointments, to passing the door with a keen glance inside to see if he could catch sight of her, to waiting on that crowded corner at night, beneath the white arc lights and in the swaying crowd, for a word when Alice started homewards. Once, his horse was at the curb when she hurried by from luncheon.

Jenifer had taken steadily to driving. That morning the park roads were hard, the sky blue, the air keen. The speed of his horse and the spin of his wheels had exhilarated him. He had come back into the city to drive slowly up the narrow shopping street and to watch the crowd; and he had remembered an errand in a near by shop.

A street-boy held the reins while Jenifer was out of

sight. The horse stood with arched neck and warm flanks and smoking nostrils; the skin of him was red brown, like old mahogany, the eyes friendly, and he turned as if looking at Alice as she hurried past.

In a second she stood by him, her bare hand on his slender muzzle. "You beauty," she exclaimed. "I wish you were mine, and I was going all day behind you." She half-whispered it beneath her breath and it was but an idle impulse of the moment, rooted in no real appreciation; but Jenifer came up behind her and heard.

"Try it," he said, with a laugh, over her shoulder.

Alice wheeled to face him. "Oh, is it yours?"

"No. But there are plenty of others in the stable. I wouldn't take him out again to-day; but if you will go, if you will try one of the others —"

"I?" bitterly. "I'll be there," with a wave of her hand towards the entrance of the store.

"You might take a little holiday now and then," Jenifer urged.

"And lose my job?" The young woman knew that the blue eyes and fluffed hair held it more than her efficiency. She dared no liberties.

"Do you expect to stand there," asked Jenifer hotly, "there in one spot not big enough to pace a horse in, where you couldn't even turn one around — God!" Suddenly he saw what such days would mean for him; and he measured her horror by his. "Do you expect to stay there always, all your life?"

"I don't know." The girl's lashes were on her cheeks and her cheeks were pink; but her lips trembled.

At that hour few were on the street. The cars clanged past; a boy, not far away, fondled his fading roses: none heeded those two. The boy at the horse's head could not hear their speech.

"What is the matter?" asked Jenifer in quick dismay. "You — you are not crying?"

Her lashes were not wet; but they were not uplifted.

"What is it?" he repeated impatiently.

"Nothing — only — that was one of the men from the store. Did you see him, how he looked at us and laughed? And he will tell everybody that he saw me talking to you, and — and —" she stammered.

Jenifer made one step. It brought him so near that his foot was on the hem of her skirt. "And what?" he demanded.

"They tease me to death," she pouted, with a quick glint of blue from under her lashes.

"Here!" Jenifer called to the boy, and seized the reins, holding them in one strong hand. The other was on the girl's arm. "Get in," he said steadily.

Alice tried to pull herself away, and to look at him. But Jenifer's quick glance had told him that she was fully wrapped. Her coat was open, her gloves in her hand, her hat pinned carelessly; but she was protected.

"Get in," he repeated masterfully, his touch as compelling as his tone.

Alice was smiling demurely as the robes were tucked about her and the horse was dashing, twisting between the wagons, up the street.

. . . . .

Jenifer came in his room at dusk. His eyes were



dark and shining, his face flushed. Every inch of him was straight and exultant.

Wheatham sat by the unsteady table, his restless fingers pencilling the outlines of a cartoon, and he was whistling, and breaking the tune with laughter as he worked.

"Hello!" He sat up straight at the slam of the door, and his eyes, filled with the film of fancy, brightened and widened as he looked.

Jenifer stood with his back against the door, its dark panels making a background for his lithe figure, his reddened cheeks, his glowing eyes.

"Tom," he said to the other man slowly, "Tom, I'm married."

## VII

WHEATHAM looked down the listed licenses in the morning. He saw their names: "Alice Mason, aged twenty-six;" and there had not been a day of those last six years when she would not have flung everything on the bare chance of escaping the grind into which she had fallen when she had first pinned a black apron about her thin, pathetic, childish self and hurried up and down the store's aisles at the command of any clerk.

The groom's age was twenty-three.

But whether Jenifer had made or marred he was out of sight of Wheatham's silent questioning in a day or two. He had gone to the city of adventurers. Wheatham was to start soon for the mountains, Ben with him. The lawyer whose skill had effected the sale of the acres was to advise in Wheatham's bargaining for the tilling of the fields; in all else the artist was to have free hand. The business was simple and easily arranged.

New York, with the new wife's pointing, proved the gateway of Europe. The manner of their journeying there was curious. For her, the fervid heart of every city; for him, its quaint or curious places. For her, the hard-trodden, crowd-pressed road; for him, the

unknown path, the unguessed byway. Jenifer, somehow, even in his ignorance, found these out.

They were both too newly from the poor to feel in old lands and ancient capitals that Jenifer's slender wealth was less than luxury; or that there was any need in any part of the earth for those conventions they had not grasped.

If Jenifer, with that strange sense for searching out things at first hand, wished to tramp English lanes, through fields where the grain rolled like a green sea to break against the highway or by cherry orchards, white and fragrant, or along roads where the black-berry spread pink-tinged blossoms, what hindered Alice's open delight in shops and lounging places of London? Neither found it strange that they were willing so soon to be parted.

Thus it came that Jenifer learned the Frenchman's way of harvest; Alice, his methods of millinery. Jenifer noticed the quiet homes and thrifty ways, and felt the charm of low cottages and circling doves and barefoot children; she, the allurements of cafés and drives and theatre-halls.

Jenifer's mind, as he journeyed, was filled with compassion. That man should work and delve and live for generations in such narrow compass with such small meed of comfort! That earth's bare soil should anywhere be a treasure for men to bear upon their backs and pack between the rocks to set their seedlings in! The thought of his own lands grew strong and warm. He planned what he should do when he went back to them and what hints of old world wisdom he

would seize upon. But he was not ready to return. He was greedy to see how this round world, whose image spun upon its axis in the school where he had been taught, bore mountain and field and meadow and still stream and rushing river and blue sea, and how people alien to one another, divided by custom, speech, race history, are yet alike in all significant things of life.

From England Jenifer sent home a string of horses, sheep, whose breed, mingled with that of the county's kind, would make strong flocks for the mountainsides, and cattle, short horned and deep chested; and he sent in charge of them an Englishman whose skill with stock would be of use. Wheatham was begged to stay on, though his work on the house was done.

It was in Paris that Alice, fresh from a glittering shop and with eyes dazzled by brilliant beauty, complained: "You have never given me a wedding present."

Jenifer was looking from the window. A man in the street below was beating his horse mercilessly, and Jenifer was furious. He knew scarce a word of the language, and should he do what he longed to do, the street crowd might be startled. He scarcely heard what Alice said.

"Haven't I?" he asked absently; Alice thought, carelessly.

"No, you have not; and I want it now."

Jenifer turned to look at her with tolerant good humor. "It's too late," he declared, a gleam of laughter at her vexation in his eyes.

"It's never too late to do what has not been done at all."

"Alice," he teased, "you are spoiled."

She flirted away, but threw him a glance over her shoulder. Of course she was spoiled. This existence was as delightful to her as a dream.

"I always intended to give you something by which you might remember — that is, if you need it," he added with a lazy laugh, looking straight at her, her supple figure and lace gown, her head and slender neck.

"I will do so now," he said slowly.

"What — what will it be?" Alice clasped her hands tightly, and leaned forward coaxingly.

Jenifer laughed at the flash of eagerness. "I will tell you to-morrow."

"To-morrow! That is too long to wait."

"You will have to endure it." He came a step nearer. The red on her cheeks and the flash in her eyes brightened a face that had begun to be a trifle listless. "You are no such baby."

"I?" She rarely remembered she was the elder. Jenifer's gravity and masterful manner levelled the years between. Now she resented the remembrance and whirled away petulantly from the room.

Still, her soul was possessed with wonder as to what the gift would be. She recalled the baubles she had most openly longed for, weighing her desire for each. She remembered the things of which she had not spoken, but at which she had gazed longingly, till fretful waiting was maddening to her.

But the gift was not received. Jenifer fussed over

"A dog-gone country where they don't know how to do anything;" and Alice, always in awe of his taciturnity, would not question. Yet as she waited, the greatness of the thing she was to receive grew in her mind, and it wore always one guise, — the sparkle of rich jewelry. She had begun to doubt only its setting and its hue.

Then Jenifer came in one day at dusk, and a glance at his cleared face reassured her. She sprang from the sofa where, in spite of her beruffled gown, she had been lounging, and ran up to him.

"You have it?" she cried, her hands clasped on his arm. Tall as she was, her head reached but beyond his shoulder. "You have it?"

Jenifer's laugh and the delight in his eyes answered her. "What is it?" with impatient running of her hand across his breast to see which pocket bulged the widest.

"Here!" He unbuttoned his coat, and took from an inner pocket a stiff and red-sealed paper. "Wait!" The thrill in his voice kept her still. "Wait till I get a light. No," though his hand crept out to hers, as she pushed against the table and the heavy perfume of her hair and garments was in his face, while, with slow deliberate movements which set her aquiver with impatience, his free hand lighted the wick and flared up the lamp.

"Now," he cried exultantly, as he flung the stiff folded paper down on the table before her.

"What is it?" asked Alice weakly.

"Look!" He leaned above her, ready to laugh when he saw her delight.



Alice picked up the parchment gingerly, as if afraid to touch even with her finger-tips its red seals.

"Open it. Don't be afraid."

She took no hint from the thrill in Jenifer's voice. She was cold with fury at this — this cheat. What did she want with documents? Jewels to glitter as they ran through her fingers, to sparkle beneath the light, to gleam upon her breast, — those she wished.

"Read it." Jenifer's voice grew a shade impatient.

Her fingers fumbled with the folds and her intelligence gleaned slowly from the verbiage a meaning. "What is this? I don't understand," she vowed hotly.

"Read it again. See for yourself." Jenifer's voice was again teasing. He was so sure of her joy, when once she understood.

"It says — The idea! You haven't done that? You haven't given me — I don't want it. What made you think of it? It would be mine anyway — part of it," she flung out with brutal plainness.

"Alice," Jenifer's face was as white as the marble beneath his hand, "I — I always thought a woman should own a home. I have given you the house and quarters on The Place and all they hold. This deed makes them yours," he added proudly.

"Pshaw!" She flung the parchment from her. The stiff paper whizzed across the table, cutting at his finger-tips, and fell at his feet.

Somehow Jenifer had learned — or had he inherited the idea? — that the only thing to do with an angry woman is to leave her alone. He had offered her a share in what he considered the most precious possession

of the world, and thus she valued it. He turned from her angry eyes and the tongue that soon would have found words aplenty, and went out of the room and away from the house.

He was sufficient to himself, too much so for the peace of the shallow woman he had married; and he could always find his own quiet amusements. When he came back the lamp was darkened, Alice asleep, the paper gone.

It was from this, or, perhaps, because they had been too long away and the flotsam and jetsam of Continental ideas had touched her; or, it may be, because Alice had become too used to her pleasures and looked abroad to add to them, but from this fit of temper a change crept into her manner.

She was no longer so unconscious that the look of a man who passed her in the street was unnoticed, nor so clearly pleased at some open-air café that the pleasure was an absorption, nor so enwrapped by the glitter of a window-show that the loiterer watching her passed on. It was long before Jenifer did, or could, take notice of it, for these things were too foreign to his ideas of womankind. When he did —

They were in Berlin. The man was an officer. Jenifer had noticed him as they drove under the arched lindens to watch the throng of walk and drive. The fellow stood well out near the curb, and there was something in his well set-up figure and in his blondness which overshadowed even his self-conscious look.

Jenifer looked at the man because he was a pleasant sight and he had already noticed his glitter and gilt

across from them at a restaurant. There was some thing in the German's regard which Jenifer termed insolence and attributed to notice of their strangeness to the customs of the country. A week later Jenifer saw him talking to Alice on a bench far back from the drive.

Jenifer's wife sat very still, with lowered lashes and pleased lips. She trailed the point of her parasol through the grasses at her feet. Jenifer, behind a swift horse, saw, and drove on. He would make no show where the world could see.

Half a mile ahead he turned a loop of the drive and came home another way. He sought the services of man and maid in the house where he lodged; and if the morning were fine and his wife late from her walk, it gave him the more time.

When Alice came in with flushed cheeks and brightened eyes, she opened the door upon rooms stripped of the things that were hers and Jenifer's. A strapped trunk stood in the middle of the floor and through the door beyond she could see others.

"What is this? What is the matter?" she gasped.

Jenifer was taciturn, but there were times when he spoke straight to the purpose. "We are going home," he said briefly.

"Home! When?" The words choked her. She grasped at the knob of the door which she had closed behind her.

"Now," briefly, and most matter-of-fact. "We have time for luncheon first," he added calmly.

"I can't. I can't do it. I won't. We were to go to

Paris again. You said we would. I wanted — Who put my clothes in those trunks? Who dared to touch them?"

At her shrilling Jenifer looked up. He was so clearly and genuinely amused that the words died in her throat. "I have nothing to travel in," she added helplessly.

His glance swept her. "Your dress is charming," he assured her; and if his tone held a tinge of sarcasm he spoke truth. Alice, catching sight of herself in the mirror which reflected the dark door, her slender figure and angry, frightened face against it, was not too furious to feel a thrill of pleased vanity. The high head and angry eyes and blazing cheeks were prettier far than dull pallor. She flirted out of the room.

"You cannot get a berth," she declared angrily on the stair.

"A ship sails from Amsterdam to-morrow. I have telegraphed."

"You know it will be impossible for us to engage passage now."

"We might," said Jenifer lightly. "We might be successful; come on. We have just time for luncheon." Alice leaned against the banister; and he, tall and straight-hipped and with determined eyes, towered above her. "This time of the year we might get a berth," he again assured her; and he was right. The second morning found them on the Atlantic.

When they neared New York, for which Alice longed, the thought of the city was hateful to Jenifer. He had gazed his full at other lands and longed passionately

for that part of the earth which was his own; and there was no gainsaying his desire. The train swept them with express speed across wide and tide-swept marshes, through towns and cities, across deep rivers, along flat lands where the water was always in sight, across rolling and barren country, and up, up to higher hills and bolder slopes. The sun lay brilliant on fields whose breadth and wildness delighted Jenifer, sick of old world trimness.

It was spring, and the young wheat grew thick in the hollows and thinned upon the swells till the red earth showed through. Cattle strayed over the dried stems of last year's grasses while the new was green beneath their feet. Jenifer, straight in his seat, watching the world through which they sped, felt the blood pounding in his veins.

Chestnut-trees darkened the steel rails. Through the flickering shadows of the woods flamed the honeysuckle, pink-lipped and tendrilled. Violets stole to the cross-ties, and blue spread the wild forget-me-nots like rugs for prayer, for worshipping of the spring. On the fences, wound in and out, poised the redbird, and flitted the bluebird, and sang the mocking-bird, his song shrilling above the engine's beat and the wheels' steady hum.

The land tilted higher. Where it crested it showed red against the arch of blue. Deep-cut, the roads wound between the fields and lay upon the hills like ribbons leading brilliantly to the sky.

Home! Home! Far in the hill-folds was the cabin where he had been born; between the circling mountain

ranges was the house he was to call his own: and the climb grew steeper.

Trestles with tree-tops below; sharp grades; a run of land newly overgrown by thickets; a dip between red hills; a climb; and a slow breathing at the engine's throat. "We are there," cried Jenifer. Alice was half-asleep.

When she came out on the platform she was suddenly alert. The picture pleased, — a number of men, a scattered leisurely crowd, an air of ease.

Jenifer caught sight of the Englishman he had sent on, and Alice saw approaching them a broad-shouldered, sturdy young man whose top-boots and stiff hat and light clothes she did not at once construe into livery. She was astonished at Jenifer's commands. Then she understood. The crimson swept her face. She was come to her own. She saw it in the splendid horses and the shining carriage, and she sprang in and settled back luxuriously. Her face was bright as she pulled her skirts aside to make room for Jenifer; but he did not see the movement. The Englishman had sprung up to the driver's seat, and Jenifer was looking at him.

"The other side," he commanded briefly; and the reins were in his own hands, the tug of them between his fingers.

God! What it was to be alive! The town with its lines of lights was behind them. The horses sped like the wind. Jenifer breathed them at a stream, and kept them to a slow pace up the long hill beyond. The air, pure from wide spaces, blew against his cheek. Dogs barked from the wayside huts; the cattle of the cabins

were straying slowly homeward with low calls of contentment and lazy breathings of satisfaction; sturdier houses stood in their screen of trees; the light lay red and clear behind the western mountains; but the miles stretched on.

The woman on the seat behind Jenifer grasped the cushions by her side, and wondered how far the wild road led; but she would not ask.

On by plowed fields, and fields where the sedge sighed low in the evening wind; splashing through shallow streams, and up. The evening star stood clear and white in the green breadth of the west; below it, darkened the mountains. How they crowded! On either hand their tops swept far and blue, and, to the woman, desolate.

There were no houses now, but wide fields and the dim and dark and dusky points of forests running towards the road, and somewhere a night-bird calling. Jenifer curved the horses, with a splendid sweep, into a narrow lane.

"Here we are!" he called back gaily. "This is the home road."

Who could have told Jenifer that he could feel as he did? And had they, would he have believed? He could not speak. The scent of the wild-cherry blossoms blew down the lane and the way lay straight. Well that it did for it was all a mist to him.

Through a wood of oak and chestnut they sped, and out where the way wound to a slow-heaving crest against the sky-line, where the stars were thick; very slowly now, for over that land-swell was The Place.



Suddenly the horses took it with a spurt of speed. Jenifer left them to their way, to the sweep around the orchard, through the big gate,—the lights of the house shining brilliantly across the yard,—and along the lane, which circled between the locusts and the lilac hedge and led to the stables, up to the stile. Such had been the fashion of the old road, and the artist had not marred it.

Wheatham stood on the broad top of the stile waiting for them. Such a night for home-coming! The beat of the horses' hoofs in the lane, the scent of the lilacs they must pass, the arching locusts, the stars; and far off and dim, like a vision dreamed of, the misty sweep of mountains!

## VIII

WHEATHAM had left the moss in the crannies of the brick floor of the porch and the narcissus in the grass, the lilac hedges and the old roses of moss and damask, and the flowers by the garden path — beyond it was the place of graves, brick-walled and tree-shadowed. The brick arcades from house to kitchen were undisturbed, as were those of the porches before the quarters.

Inside the house he had thought perfect, he watched its mistress coming slowly down the stair the morning after her arrival. Jenifer was on the porch.

An hour before Wheatham had been striding with him across the wet grass. Jenifer wanted to know how the sheep he had sent over fared; what colts had been foaled, and what cattle bred; what fields had been planted in corn, and where the wheat grew. He wished to see what sort of housing the range of quarters, back of the yard but opening on it, had provided for the Englishman and the servants and to examine the bachelor quarters Wheatham had set up in one of the houses detached from the range, but built like it.

Back of all this eagerness was a rapture of possession. Jenifer leaned against a rounded brick pillar of the porch and kept his lips firm shut for fear of the sound

which might break through. It would be elemental; and, being man, Jenifer kept tight-lipped. His breath heaved slowly. His hands were clasped behind his back.

Wheatham, in the door, saw him — and her.

Alice came down slowly. Her hand was white on the dark rail as it slid along it. At the landing where the filmy curtains were pulled aside, the clear glass raised, and a couch beneath the sill besought a look at that long sweep of blue, she stopped. Her glance scarce touched upon the outside world, and her disdainful look swept the dark panelled walls below, the heavy mahogany couch, the table with its gleaming leaf, the shine of brass and the glint of heavy china. But she caught a gleam upon the wall. "Oh," she cried delightedly, "a telephone!"

Wheatham swept her a bow. "Did you think we were cut off from civilization?" demanded he.

She shrugged her shoulders. "It looks it," she said beneath her breath, as she stood on the last step of the stair.

Resentment and illness had broken the calm prettiness of Alice's face. The artist liked her better so. The Frenchy gown of white swirled about her feet and lay, a frill of it, on the polished step; her fair hair was not so exaggerated by its piling; the touch of purple beneath her eyes emphasized the iris's coloring; and her height was well carried.

Wheatham, for the hour, was hopeful that he had misjudged her. He crossed the hall to talk to her. He would tell her again of that which must be common

interest, — his delightful search for the furniture and his work in having it restored; and he hoped it was as she liked.

Alice cut him short. She had scarcely listened to him the night before and had kept silent from weariness, and because she had nothing to say.

“Whom can you talk to?” she interrupted, with an eager gesture towards the telephone.

Wheatham pointed to the book which hung upon the wall.

“Good gracious!” cried Alice petulantly, as she whirled the leaves. “I don’t know a soul, of course. It will do me no good. But — Oh, could I — could I talk to any one in Baltimore?” she demanded breathlessly. At the back she had found a list of cities.

“It is at your service,” Wheatham assured her with twinkling eyes. “New York, Chicago, Atlanta; I am afraid to venture farther,” with mock solemnity.

“I shall try — I might talk to some one at home.”

“You had better wait till you have had your breakfast. It’s a tedious job getting anybody. Come, see the world from your door.”

Alice stepped out where the passing of many feet had worn smooth hollows in the marble and on the bricks. Jenifer turned slowly. She could see the bright line of his shining eyes, his reddened cheek, and his straight-set mouth. Their glances met and crossed, and both looked out across the rolling land.

On a far-off hill, amidst thick trees, showed the dim outlines of a house. The thin smoke curled above its chimney. “Who lives there?” asked Alice suddenly.

"There?" Jenifer turned to look. "Do you know?" he asked Wheatham carelessly.

The artist named the owner.

"Don't you know them?" demanded Alice sharply.

"I? Oh, yes; the name," said Jenifer calmly. "But I didn't know any of the Grenwalds had bought that place," he added with an easy laugh.

"And you don't know the people there?" she persisted.

"No."

"Are there any neighbors nearer?"

"They are the nearest."

"The nearest," cried Alice shrilly; "and you don't even know them! Why—"

"There is the bell," said Jenifer shortly. "Breakfast is ready, I suppose."

It took all that morning for Alice to call up the distant city and get the person with whom she wished to talk; and while she waited she sauntered idly into the big rooms, and out again. How high were the ceilings above her head; and how insignificant they made her feel! How heavy and dark the old furniture! And the house was filled with it,—the dining-room, this parlor which opened into it, the library across the hall. That was the worst of all, that room with its musty, time-stained books, its deep window-sills, its wide but small-paned windows, its black fireplace.

But there, though Alice did not know it, the artist had achieved his dream. Lingered in that still silence he had wrought out the thing he longed to do and sent it forth, and the world gave it homage. On the strength

of that praise, other visions had been born and shaped; and Wheatham worked, where he had taken quarter, slowly and blissfully.

His newspaper work had taught him that the pyrotechnic product, blaze it ever so brightly, is but ash against the sky, and he thanked God that his success was such as to be reason for work and had not sated alike his public and himself.

Of this secret which the solemn room held, — solemn till the man or woman's self was in accord with it, — of the glowing words written there, of the great deeds planned, and the history which had had its beginnings by that hearth what possible knowledge had Alice? Only the sunlit hall with the wind blowing through and the telephone upon the wall was bearable to her; and across the field the only hopeful sign she saw was the stretch of the tall gray poles, the cross of their fire-bearing tops, and the shine of the single wire which spun away. She heard the singing of the wind against its tautness, and felt that but for it the silence of the porch would be past endurance.

Impatiently, once and again, she set the handle whirling only to hear a tired: "Can't get them at the other end of the line. Call you when I do." Central had begun to wonder wearily what this new-comer would prove to be.

Alice wandered up-stairs to her own room, or suite, as Wheatham had designed it.

The servants, she had already found, finished their duties in the house and disappeared. From the quarters came now the sound of laughter for which she longed.

Alice leaned head and shoulders from the window, listening wistfully; and as she gazed, discontent already on her face, the Englishman came to his door and looked across and up.

The clothes of his calling gave him distinction where such were not frequent; they showed his sturdy figure and square shoulders, and his ruddiness was comely. Before she was aware, the mistress of the house leaned farther out and smiled warmly.

The Englishman's hand went to his cap. He turned quickly and there was but the blackness of his open door.

Alice drew back frowning, but she had time to feel angry neither with herself nor him. The telephone bell was ringing in the hall below.

She ran down the stair. "Yes, yes," she breathed into the tube.

"Eugenia!" she cried. Her younger sister was at the other end of the line.

"Yes, it's me! Scared were you?" laughing loudly. "Didn't know I was coming? Neither did I. Yes, I'm home." Her voice dropped into an inflection which carried across the miles.

"What did you say? Carriages? Of course! Big house? Tremendous. Servants?" answering the rapid questions. "Oh, yes." And then sounded into the woman's ear a thin ecstatic "Oh!"

How hot had seemed the bricks to Eugenia's feet as she went down the street, how blinding the heat that beat against the wall! How wonderful it was to hear of such great fortune!



"I am coming to see you," sounded the voice along the line.

"I wish you would," cried Alice fervently.

"Of course."

"When?"

"When I have my holiday."

"How soon is that?" impatiently.

"August."

"Oh!"

A laugh, a few short sentences, — there is at first little to say when people have been long apart, — and the talk soon ended. But it gave Alice something to think of and plan for, that and the unpacking of her trunks.

Jenifer had never an idle moment. Crops and fences and woods, pasture and cattle, stable and horses; and his knowledge of them adjusted, Jenifer began to see that there were human tangles at hand.

Wheatham was clearly restless. Now that the master of the house had come and the artist's work for him was done, Wheatham was wondering if he must not be gone. He stammered something of it to Jenifer.

"Where do you want to go?" asked Jenifer so calmly that Wheatham was deceived.

"Where?" And then bluntly, "The Lord only knows."

"What's the matter with this?"

"Matter!" Wheatham again repeated. He looked about him. Two houses of one room each had been detached by the builder from the range of quarters. The Englishman had one; Wheatham the other. No

furnishings had been allowed in this, only odd bits of furniture and cleanly comfort; and, sidewise to the window and thrusting half-across the room, a huge table, wide and strong, and easy to elbow. The land sloped steeply outside the window and swelled high again beyond the narrow valley, where a stream sang in the bottom. A point of woods dipped to the water, and on the farthest line of vision were haze and mist and mountain tops.

Wheatham wondered dully if he could ever accomplish anything anywhere else. He was hot with anger at himself for so loving what was not his nor ever would be, except that beauty and inspiration of it which he had caught in spirit.

"You are satisfied?"

"Oh, God knows, yes."

"I am."

The eager flush ran over Wheatham's face. "But perhaps your wife — with her — you want no one else about," he blurted.

"Good Lord!" Jenifer's amazement was so certain that it amused. His laugh broke the tension between them.

"Then — then you must allow for my keep."

"Don't you think that is enough?" asked Jenifer, coming up to him as Wheatham leaned against the window-frame.

"But it's yours."

"And yours — what you want of it."

"No." Wheatham was firm. He named a sum.

"I shall pay it to your wife," he insisted.



"THE LAND SLOPED STEEPLY OUTSIDE THE WINDOW AND SWELLED HIGH AGAIN  
BEYOND THE NARROW VALLEY." *Page 78.*



Jenifer, with a remembrance of Alice's love for money, her passion for handling it and spending it, laughed. "It will suit her well enough," he declared lightly.

"And me also. I shall do it."

Jenifer let it stand. His hand, for a second, fell firm and warm on the artist's shoulder before Jenifer left the brick-walled room.

Yet Wheatham was angered with himself for this passion of place which had eaten into him. Why had it become so much to him? The poet part of him might have answered, and comforted him.

It might have told him that out of all loves two primal ones forever remain — the love of the earth, the love of God. Out of the earth He made man; into the image He breathed His spirit: and like still calls to like.

## IX

BEN had developed a bitter rivalry towards the Englishman. He hated him with that curious disdain the negro feels when he comes in contact with the white man who sees in dusky skin and racial qualities no signal of inferiority. He hated him for his science, where he himself had only instinct, and but for the Englishman's obtuseness and his acceptance of Ben's surliness as a part of the strangeness of a race with which he had newly come in contact, there would have been trouble.

No one, not Wheatham himself, had so rejoiced at Jenifer's coming, as Ben.

"Lawd," he said to Jenifer, as Ben followed him across the fields, "now you'll see some sense in de way things goes on dis place. Dat man!" It was the negro's scornful phrase for the Englishman, and his ideas of the other's management were unspeakable. Ben shook his head and pursed his lips, but could find no word to express what he thought. Besides, they had reached the paddock.

Jenifer leaned his arms on the high topmost rail and looked with delighted eyes on the roll of green land, the sparkling stream at the bottom, the tall grass that well-nigh hid the water, and the cluster of thin-legged

and slim-bodied colts which crowded close for company.

"Dat colt," vowed Ben, as one turned his head and arched his neck and looked back at them, "dat colt he's turned three years, an' ain't nobody dare tetch him. When dey does dyar'll be de debbil to pay sho. Talk 'bout nobody, light weight nor none, ebbah puttin' a leg arcross a hoss's back tell he is full-growed! no, sah! De time to begin is early, boy on a colt's back fetching him 'long to watah, wid a kick on his ribs to make him go straight, dat's de way to gentle him.

"An' dat man, dis is his way. Paddock, he call dis place. Lawd! why don't he turn de colts out an' git 'em room, an' let 'em loose. Dey'd git up an' grow same lak de grass."

"Looks as if these fellows were doing all right," declared Jenifer lazily.

"Dey's ol' ernuff," grumbled Ben.

"What horse is that?" demanded Jenifer quickly, as a bay trotted out from the crowd to thrust her muzzle into the stream.

"Dat? Dat's Lightfoot," in a tone of intense satisfaction. "An' she's de onlies' one dat's got a name. He done had her writ down in de book."

"Registered? Are you sure?"

"Yes, sah," emphatically. "Sire Dixie, dam Beauty," Ben repeated glibly.

"Ever been ridden?"

"Dat man done his hop-skippin' what de calls ridin' on her back. Ebry time he riz up in de stirrups you



could view de mountains 'twixt him an' de saddle. Fac'," at Jenifer's shake of silent laughter.

"Bring a saddle here," commanded Jenifer, as he turned his arm upon the rail.

"Sah!" Ben's mouth dropped wide open.

"Bring a saddle and bridle down here; I'm going to try her."

"Whar?"

"Here, anywhere; across the field." The land about the paddock was "resting."

"Dat I will. Dat I will." Ben, scenting fun and a rise out of the Englishman, sped up the hill.

The fun was not so furious as the negro had expected. The Englishman's training of Lightfoot had been more thorough than the negro gave him credit for; and, also, Lightfoot's nature, like her birth, was gentle.

Her rearing and plunging were all false starts to what Ben looked for, perhaps hoped for. His "Dyar she goes," "'Fore de Lawd!" "Set tight," were useless, if hilarious, warnings.

Over and across the field they circled, man fitting himself to horse and horse to man. Jenifer came back in easy lope. "Take her to the stable," he commanded.

"Yes; yes, sah," doubtfully.

"I shall ride her," declared Jenifer succinctly.

Ben, racing with the bridle end in hand, and Lightfoot, keeping the rein loose as she trotted near, were off. At the stable door they met the Englishman. It was all that Ben desired.

"What are you doing with that horse?" Grame demanded angrily.

"Dis hoss?" Ben's eyes were wide and fathomless. "Dis Marse Jen'fah's ridin' hoss. He done tol' me to bring her up to the stable."

"She's not safe," the man blundered into saying. "He can't — he will not be able to ride her."

"Hi!" said the negro, "you ought to 'a' been down in de fiel' jes now. Lightfoot went jes as easy, an' Marse Jen'fah, he suttently sits his hoss lak a gemmen, same as ef he an' de saddle was made tergedder, an' de hoss 'long 'bout de same time. You ought to 'a' seed 'em."

Ben chuckled innocently; but he flashed a look out of the tail of his eye as the horse went by; and when he saw a redness of Grame's cheeks which was not altogether ruddiness, he chuckled anew — but to himself.

Lightfoot had come to the stable's best.

Jenifer watched man and horse till they were over the hill, then he turned his back towards the house, and sauntered slowly. His hat was low over his eyes, his hands in his pockets. Wild grasses and vines and vetches ran over the furrows. Where the stream came singing the grass was knee-deep. Wood-alder pushed out its stiff and unopened bloom above the water. Ferns touched the ripples lightly. But without a look at pools or shallows Jenifer sprang over.

He was whistling softly to himself, whistling against his memories. Beyond the wood — not a mile in thickness — was the cabin he remembered. It was deserted, and the land about it ran wild; Jenifer had asked and learned. While he was devoid of pride, he

was, also, bare of sentiment; so he would have said, and most others of him.

The leaves of long past summers rustled under his feet; those of the year whispered softly overhead. The wood-talk waked fleeting and ungrasped thought. Of what did it hint? Jenifer's brow was furrowed; his gaze on the leaves beneath his feet.

He had been climbing steadily. Here the land crested, ran level for a space, and then was broken by wooded gulleys. A rift like that a river wears between bold bluffs was in its midst, and narrow gulleys, like short streams, ran up from it. Pines grew about the ravines, and drifted their needles upon the slopes; and the winds had heaped them in the hollows.

The drifted chaff was dry and resinous; overhead the skies were blue, the pine-tops etched against them; and hint of summer and song of spring were in their slow rocking. Jenifer stood tense and listening. He remembered that here the best his young boyhood had known had been given him. He had slid and stumbled and made summer slides down these gulleys. He had set his traps here. He had watched the birds through all this wood. He had come and gone along these paths; — but it was not the memory of these which haunted him. There had been little either lovely or happy in his boyhood, but this memory — whatever its elusiveness hinted of — was warm and bright.

Jenifer threw himself face downward on the dry chaff, and propped his chin in his hands. He was glad to be away from the old place and to think of it. It

was more than his memory, or his anticipation of it, had been; and he could dream of its possibilities.

Jenifer loved the earth enough to be glad that the legend of creation fashioned the first man from it. It was boon to live upon it, and he was willing to return unto it the elements of that body which had housed his spirit. Land and wood were part of him. To live amongst these, call *these* his own, was highest joy.

But against his content one chord already jarred. He was not blind to the dissatisfaction in Alice's face. Man-like he believed that time would efface it. He was masterfully sure that he had done right in bringing her home; and he had wondered every day since he had first set foot upon the stile and seen Wheatham's face and Ben's beyond it and the house more beautiful than he remembered it, — he had wondered how, with that awaiting him, he had lingered.

So he reasoned dreamily, forgetting the memory which had eluded him. He moved restlessly, flung out an arm, and hit upon something hard beneath the leaves. Looking carelessly he saw a mossy brick, and pushing the drift aside he uncovered a round of them set like a Runic ring.

Jenifer sprang up, laughing beneath his breath, kicked the leaves from above them; — and he remembered.

Here he had first seen a little maid, slipping along the way. The soles of her buttoned boots were bright from long walking on the chaff and she could scarcely balance herself upon them. The dimpled hands were outstretched and the eyes beneath her tossing curls

were imploring. The round and dimpled chin above her cap strings quivered, but she had not uttered a sound when the woman who should have cared for her hurried to meet another along the path.

The boy had been taking a header down the rift, and he had sat up amidst the leaves, brushing the chaff from face and eyes, and looked up at her. She had laughed; and he had run up the slope to her, and piled cones for her amusement, — done anything for the baby eyes and friendly smile. The nurse, looking back, had settled herself for comfortable talk.

The boy had searched for pebbles and broken the wild plum blossoms and sought for deep-speared mosses; and she had commanded — though she lisped.

Day by day he had haunted the gulleys and the rifts. A cabin was beyond the woods, and to this the woman came. Twice, three times — he did not know how often — he had met them and the girl had stayed and played. For her the bricks had been rounded, there she had ruled, and there, gravely and possessively, she had called him a name it reddened him to remember.

Then, though he haunted the woods, she disappeared. The little maid had been a visitor to the house which was now his, and she had gone home. What followed — his father's death, the reaching of a friendly hand to place him in the school — obscured the recollection of her. Even now it was a mist of memory, but Jenifer's heart was warm as he remembered.

He would go no farther. With closed eyes he could see the cabin he had set out to seek. He knew how the chimney must have sagged and the logs pulled from

their crossings; how the sassafras grew on the red, washed hills, and the sumach in the hollows; how the saplings stole on the little free-hold clearing, the few acres of the "poor white" on the fringes of a great estate.

It was better to linger dreaming here. But the dream of a man whose life is in deeds cuts deep. It has no trickling shallows to temper its strength, but one straight bed, and it so goes deep, and deeper.

## X

A LONG rain, the "rain of the blackberry blossoms," drove Jenifer into the library.

He had come from the hills where he searched for young cattle. The water ran from his storm-coat and from Lightfoot's mane, and the horse's flanks were rough and smoking when he rode into the stable; but his rain-lashed cheeks were red, and his eyes were glowing. He had seen the clouds rolling between the peaks; the bounding streams, and grasses bent beside them; the washed and vivid earth; the water foaming in the gulleys; and, on a worthless hillside, the clumps of Scottish broom, straight and dark and sheltering the golden blossoms at their heart.

Jenifer laughed at Ben's dismay at sight of him and at the negro's grumblings as he followed to the house.

"Ise gwine light a fiah in hyar," Ben vowed. He stood at the library door. In the other rooms Ben dared no liberties, but this, with its dark colorings and heavy massing of books, its wide tables and big chairs, its height and breadth and deep framed windows and black hearth, seemed, to the negro, masculine, belonging to the master of the house. Besides, Ben, because of what he considered Jenifer's plight, was fairly defiant. "You needs it sho," he declared.



Jenifer nodded as he ran up the stair, but he came down soon, and lightly. Alice was asleep.

The wind whistled through the hall, the rain stung across the brick floor of the porch. In the lane the locust blossoms hung like veils of white hidden behind dripping leaves. The beaten roses drooped toward the sodden grass.

"It sho is a storm," grumbled Ben, kneeling on the hearth, and sputtering in the smoke which puffed down about him. "'Clare 'tis scan'lous. Ain't nobody shet de do's, nor pull de winders down, nor — nor done nothin'. Ebry las' niggah stickin' to de quartahs, an' —" He stopped short. Another word would bring criticism on the careless sleeping mistress. "Sit down, Marse Jen'fah. Pull up hyar befo' de fiah. It's gwine be sompin soon, or I'll bust myse'f wid blowin'." Ben sat back on his heels. "Name o' Gawd, what you trapsin' 'bout so fer," he argued, "ain't yo got dat man? — don't see no good he is nohow.

"But it don't look like it huht you none," he added grudgingly, as he stood for a moment on the edge of the hearth. Jenifer was the picture of contentment and of virile strength. He was leaning back in the big chair. His hair was black and wet; his cheeks were flushed and his eyes shining with laughter at Ben's protesting grumbles. "Don't nothin' 'tall seem to huht you, nothin'," admitted Ben, who had watched amazedly as Jenifer spent every hour of the day in oversight and work, leaving no corner of the place to slip from his mastery.

Still, Ben lowered a window before he left, piled the logs higher, and looked back from the door to see if

there were more to be done for his employer's comfort. He was used to Jenifer's silences and was learning to humor them.

Jenifer did not know when Ben went out of the room. He was tingling from his fight with wind and rain, and the heat of the leaping flames made drowsy comfort. He was no reader; but he was soon restless. Unwelcome thoughts had begun to beset him and he cared for no idle hours. Wheatham, in his quarters, had come upon a time when he brooked no disturbance and glowered at any one who came even beneath the arcade before his door, while his head was bent always above his table, his cheeks red and hot, his eyes a shining line, his fingers forever busied.

What was it he had said about the books? The artist's fancy ran riot over everything about the house. Jenifer's swept to acres and woods and all living things upon and within them. While Wheatham was like the bee, seeking his own particular sweet, Jenifer's seething energy held no limitations.

He got up now, pushed the few and unopened papers restlessly about the table, walked up and down the long floor, lounged in the deep window; — still, there was nothing but the storm, the lash of it across the land, the writhing trees, the sheets of rain.

Jenifer paused before a diamond-paned case where worn and leather-bound volumes showed black on the shelves, where doors were locked and a key left carelessly. The books in this case were those about which Wheatham had raved. "Unique," "rare," he had called them; and he had dwelt longest on some manuscripts.

"How in the world you came to get them, Jenifer, I don't see; how they ever came to be sold — But they are here, and yours, all right. If ever you want to know how men lived a century and half ago, what sort of a fellow built this house, and cut down the woods for you, and made your way generally easy, you've got the record right at hand. And, I say, Jenifer," Wheatham had added earnestly, "I'd be careful with those papers. They have their own value, not to you alone, mind you, nor to those who have owned them, — they don't seem to care a rush about them, maybe didn't even know of them, — but they are valuable to the world at large. Look over them sometime, you'll see."

Jenifer remembered the leather-bound, metal-clasped tome which Wheatham had handled as he spoke. He took it down carelessly, and, leaning against the high, dark case undid the clasp and turned the stiff, time-stained, yellow pages.

Pen-written they were, but clear as print; and Jenifer's careless glance fell first on a record of marriages and then of births; and then, as he turned the leaves, on letters glued to the time-splotched pages. The names at the end amazed him. They were those who from the leading division of the colonies reached out to touch them all, to unite them, and to marshall them in array; to sound the trumpet-call to resistance, war, and free government; and to foster the newly born giant of the great and all-promising West. Here was Washington's name, here Jefferson's; Madison's followed; and others of whom history takes vivid note. Here their letters, and copies of the replies!

Jenifer strode across to the table by the fireside, spread the book upon it, wheeled a chair to face it, and, with nervous fingers thrust through his black hair, leaned above the pages.

The alien owner searched the diary of the founder of the house from whose abiding-place the race had fled. Only that brick-walled space beyond the garden paths was theirs, and there the trees beat and bent, and the water ran between the graves. Yet the vivid spirit of that long departed life leaped out along the words, and laid a hand on him — the stranger.

The building of the house, the bringing of its mistress home, the coming of the children, — a man's joy the stronger for the brevity of its telling; memoranda of his day, of men of the colonies who visited him; jottings of their wranglings over disputed points whose long ago solutions are now a country's boast; the gathering storm of discontent; these letters to him: and, between, a record for making wine, perhaps; notes on the vines he had planted on the hills; the pedigree of a horse; a line concerning a fox hunt and those who had slept on the night thereafter in his hospitable house; — the record of a life that was strong and full and jovial, its pulse beating in rhythm with the pulse of his world; of it, helping it, uplifting it, and shaping its destinies.

It showed Jenifer, not only in that one fascinated hour in the silent house, the storm outside, and within the imperious call of spirit unto spirit, but in many another searching, that they who founded the house which had come to be his had held no selfish life apart from their fellows. To live and enjoy were not enough

for them. In the questions which had come to each generation they had helped, and led. Upon their names alone could be threaded the history of their country; theirs, and *his*.

Jenifer had not had a thought concerning his neighbors. He had delighted in his possessions and the dream of what he should do with them, but already he felt a lack. He saw it not so much in his own life as in that of the woman bound to him. Visiting, cordiality, and free hospitality were the purlieus permitted the women of the house. None fell to Alice. Jenifer was living unto himself. He was yet too young to know how dreary it could prove.

These pen-written pages led him to others. The volumes in that case had been gathered by a hand which knew two loves — if they be not one — history and biography. Jenifer pursued through summer evenings and noon's still hours and winter's close-shut nights names he came to know and reverence; and with them for ideals and a new self-measurement he began to feel his content pricked at many a point and a longing which seemed hopeless of accomplishment: for the man's hamperings were not alone of his own making.

First this clear script told, while the unheeded storm roared without and the fire died on the hearth, a part of that tale the reader, stern of face and white of cheek as he read, had known and cared little for, since having always accepted it, he had half-forgotten: —

Early in the war for liberty the firm-handed writer of the diary had been wounded, sent home, and, his

disability continuing, mustered out. The few lines telling it were disjointed lamentation. The Americans had lost, New York had been evacuated, Washington was retreating through New Jersey. Then a hallelujah, and in Christmas season! Washington had fallen upon the Hessians, their leader was killed, and a thousand soldiers prisoners.

Jefferson was across the hills, and there were letters to and fro, visits and arguments — all recorded. Finally the statement of one great fact: Jefferson had persuaded Washington to send the Hessian prisoners to this then remote country to be guarded, and the man who could no longer fight, but was afire to do his country service, would be the foreigners' guardian. Their camp was to be two miles from the house, but on what was then within the plantation's boundaries; quarters of weather-boarding were put up rapidly; and in this house some of the officers were to be housed.

So far was history. It was its byway, of which on these stained pages there was no hint, which was Jenifer's story. His lineage was that of one of the officers so written about and a pretty and ignorant daughter of a small farmer of the hills; and there had been no marriage.

Disowned, the woman yet bravely made her way. A hut well hidden, a loom in whose handling she grew skilled, red earth to bear a friendly hundred-fold, and a sturdy boy growing by her side!

The boy had grown, married with his mother's kind — when she was pure — and had seen a boy born unto him. The son of that man was Jenifer's father. But the hills had not forgotten and would never forget

that story. A proud people held them, a folk whose legends from generation to generation were as familiar as the lisp upon a baby's lips.

They knew how, when the revolution was ended, some of the Hessians, freed, had returned to their own country; some had scattered through that new free land; and some had taken to those far mountains whose blueness they had grown to love and for whose wildness they were fitted; their blood still flowed in the veins of a strange folk who held aloof and lived their own traditions back in the wild pockets of the peaks.

But Jenifer's people, of which he was the last, had held on here. His name — Wooten Jenifer — memorialized his Hessian ancestor. Even this place and house were part of his history, for its "Fair Hills" had slipped long ago into the terse "Barracks."

What strangeness of fate had brought him to its possession? What remote guerdon for a woman's far-off agony did his fortune hold? Jenifer could not ask.

Stumbling to his feet, and striding through the hall and out to the porch and fresh air, he looked, with stern eyes, across the rain-washed hills towards that on which the prisoners' camp had stood. His strong hand gripping the rounded, brick-made pillar, slipped upon grooved lines, letters cut deep. There were many upon the porch, and some which he had noted carelessly. But this had been unseen. And, broken, moss-grown, beneath his fingers, this was W.



## XI

" I SHOULD like to know what there is for any one to do here? "

The question was a challenge. Alice's blue eyes were hard and sullen as she looked across the table.

" To do? " Jenifer asked helplessly. He was, that morning, absolutely content. The cool air stole through the room; the breath of honeysuckle came with it, and the song of a mocking-bird. Jenifer's plans were endless and his mind had been full of them, as Wheatham talked carelessly of the day and the roses abloom.

" Why — " began Jenifer, and stopped again, as much at sea as he had been before.

The women of such houses as this had always had a press of duties. Jenifer's hazy memory painted pictures of gracious mistresses with jingling keys, who gave long hours of oversight and careful orders; or, with skirts held daintily, lingered in the garden walks commanding work in flower-bordered squares.

" Is there anything you would like to have done in the garden? " he asked quickly, catching at the last thought.

" The garden! I cannot bear it, I cannot open the gate without seeing that — that dreadful place."

" You don't mean the graveyard? "

Alice leaned her elbows on the table and shivered as she bent her head upon her hands.

"I don't know what there is about that — Are you afraid of it?" with a slight emphasis of scorn.

"There is not a servant on the place who will cross that field after dark," Alice flashed.

"Oh, they are always superstitious. Are you? Is that it?" he teased.

"No, it is not. But I don't see why that — that place — why they should have chosen that — a spot forever in sight."

Jenifer went on with his meal. If that idle and senseless complaint were all Alice had in mind, it was not worth talking about. It seemed to him fitting that the abiding-place of the dead should be near enough for sight and care; and he had thought a man might live the better for remembering how soon his life is sped; or, rather, not being of analytic mind, it seemed to him a roundness and completion. Amongst his first orders had been those which cleared the neglected mounds, and put trim the space within the walls.

"Then you don't want to take care of the garden?" he asked again.

"No," said Alice shortly.

Wheatham, silent in his chair, had a swift vision of a woman in the paths, marjoram and bergamot and pale sage brushing her skirts as she passed, chrysanthemums, in their season, wine-red at her feet. Alice, tall and fair-haired, might have fitted to the picture. Why did she reject it all?

The slight hold she had at first taken loosened in her fingers. The house which might have been a delight in some woman's hands showed already neglect of

service. The servants shirked their duties, bestowing less attention on the house and more on themselves, with idleness and laughter; and in place of their guidance was fault-finding from the mistress.

The artist had pictured the house, as he planned its furnishings, with one who loved it as its gracious ruler. He had imaged the windows flung wide to morning air, the bowls heaped with blossomings, the floor polished to give back her shadow as she passed; or dim at noon with closed shutters, and dusky sweetness beneath the ceiling; or at evening when the wide hall was gathering-place, or the porch loitering-ground, or the stile — God! it made him half in love himself with any woman who would but hold the drapery of his dreams upon her shoulders. But this woman refused her kingdom: worse, she did not see it.

“How would you like to take charge of the chickens?” asked Jenifer, his mind upon her dissatisfaction and her wants. He knew its surest cure, and its only one, was work and interest.

“I?” with blue eyes wide. “I? I don’t know a thing about them, and I don’t want to know,” she cried, pushing back her chair and springing to her feet.

Jenifer finished his breakfast calmly. He was not worried. He could not imagine failure to find eventually an interest in such a life as this he offered to his wife: and he had left Alice to find her bearings, and take what best pleased her; but her listlessness and moping began to wear on him.

“Alice,” he asked when he found her in the hall, “would you like to go driving this afternoon?”

"Where?" she demanded eagerly.

"Wherever you like." He seated himself comfortably on the worn step.

"Oh!"

Jenifer caught the tone, and looked up keenly from the match whose flame he sheltered with his curved palm.

"Anywhere you want to go particularly?"

"No — unless — Is there anybody around here to go and see?"

"No one has been to see us. The people around here are not much given to that sort of thing — going to see strangers."

"What do they do then?" she demanded impatiently.

A dark red streaked Jenifer's cheek. "Work; and hard enough, too."

"But the women?" Alice persisted.

"Well, I expect if you saw them you would say they worked also," he answered lazily, his good-nature easily restored.

"Not all the time?"

He laughed, knowing something of the women's ways.

"Well?" petulantly.

Jenifer shook his head as he flung the match into the grass. He could not tell, because he could not put it into words, of that good-fellowship, ironclad towards one who was not desired, and, as he wanted none of it himself, as yet, he could not gauge her lack.

"It's lonely here," Alice complained, as if she spoke to herself.

"Lonely! Lord!" Jenifer looked up ready to

laugh. She could not be in earnest. "You must find something to do," he lightly advised.

"What?"

"Give it up. Alice!" as she whirled away. He was about to make some hot protest, but he caught himself in time. "Do you want some money?" he ended lamely.

It was a question for which she had but one answer, one and always. She stood still looking back at him over her shoulder. Her skirt and the puff of her thin blouse and the fluff of her hair swayed in the wind which stole through the hall. The darkness of its setting made her fairness the brighter. If only the lips had curved, the eyes had laughed!

"What would you do with it?"

Alice stood silent. She did not know; only, she wanted it.

"You have clothes enough?" he asked anxiously. Jenifer's was the nature which would have gloried to put bounty and luxury within a woman's hand and asked but her pride in it, her gaiety, and — had he known what such would have meant to him — her love. "If you have not —"

"I have plenty," she was forced to admit.

"I should think so," with a careless remembrance of her trunks. "And there are not many places to go —"

It was fuel to fire. With an exclamation Jenifer did not hear, Alice ran half-way up the stair, stopped on the landing, — and came down again.

He was watching her, uncomprehending. His hand was still in his pocket and his good-nature held. His wrath she had never seen, nor had he guessed its force.

"Well," he teased, "you have not told me." Not that he cared. Jenifer was only trying to talk and be careless, to ease the tug of whose strain he was vaguely aware.

"I don't know," she admitted, as she leaned against the door-frame.

"Make up your mind. There's all day."

"Would you care," she began slowly, — "would you mind if I—I hate all that stuff up-stairs," she rushed on, "my room, the sitting-room, all of it. Dull, heavy, hideous! It makes my flesh creep. Why can't I fix them, furnish them to suit myself?" She paused breathless.

"What do you want to do? How much do you need?" he asked after a moment's silence.

"I don't know. Suppose —" in a sudden flash of enthusiasm — "Suppose I go to the city and get what I want." Her voice faltered at the end, for she saw the expression on his face.

"Not now, Alice; not now. You haven't — you haven't been home long enough to get used to things."

"How can I get anything then?"

Jenifer made an easy gesture towards the telephone. "That and Uncle Sam. And there are some pretty good shops in town. You can drive in."

"Pshaw!" with disdain of local stores. But her cheeks were red and her eyes laughing. "When are we going driving?" she called from the stair.

"Four. Will that suit?"

"All right!"

Jenifer remembered the laughing face and watched

for the look of it when Alice came out across the porch and trailed her filmy skirts along the worn brick paths. Very light they were, her skirts, and lace-like; and the ends of them seemed to have been saved and gathered up, and fashioned with soft plumage to crown her head. The foot she put upon the stile was slipped faultlessly; the gloves upon her fingers were white as the locust blossoms. Her eyes held only pleased vanity at Jenifer's long look and the delight she saw leap into his eyes. The gleam died instantly from her face when Jenifer assisted her to the seat behind that on which he must sit to drive.

The bays were harnessed, and the carriage ordered for the mistress's pleasure; but blooded horses pulling at the reins and the jolting of a mountain road are not conducive to talk. Now and then Jenifer roused himself. The electric plant, which Wheatham had had nearly finished and on which men were working, was about done. The water-tower was complete. The cattle sent from England thrived. All this talk was utterly wearisome to his listener. As they neared the house he asked: "Would you like to learn how to drive?"

Alice shook her head.

"Or ride?" Jenifer loosened the reins, and turned carelessly on his seat.

"To ride?" her blue eyes flew wide open. "That would be nice."

"Good!" he laughed. "Are you really in earnest?"

"Certainly! When can I begin? To-morrow?" She leaned forward eagerly. The plumes on her hat brushed his face.



"Whenever you are ready." Jenifer's delight was keen. Here was a thing which he would like her to do and which she really seemed to desire to try. "I will pick you out a horse, or would you rather choose for yourself?"

"Goodness! I know nothing about them." Neither love of horse-flesh nor country nor exercise prompted her; only a wish for something to do, and riding, in her eyes, bore a show of luxury and elegance. It sounded well, and it would be something to write about.

"I don't know who will teach you," began Jenifer thoughtfully. "I can go with you at first; and afterwards, Ben sometimes."

"Ben! I don't want him." There was antipathy between the two.

"How would Grame do?" He missed the quick questioning of Alice's eyes. "Only don't let him teach you to ride as he does," Jenifer laughed, as they swept into the lane.

Ben, at the horses' heads, caught something of Jenifer's teasing as he and Alice crossed the stile. The negro shook his head as he jumped to the driver's seat. He had seen much of which Jenifer was unaware. "Bettah min' what you doin'," Ben muttered, his eyes on Jenifer's straight figure and easy step; "bettah min'." And as the horses circled to the stables: "'Deed you had." But Jenifer's days were full and even the hours, which might have been leisure ones, absorbed.

"Lawd," groaned Ben, as he wandered up and down the lane one night and watched the flare of the library lamp into the summer darkness and Jenifer bent beside

it, book in hand, " Lawd, I suttently did think he had mo' sense. Dem books, dey jes puts out his min' an' make him blin'. He don't see nothin'. An' what he sees in dem! He bettah open his eyes to some things right hyar. 'Tain't wuth while to take to readin' to fin' out things. Dyar's plenty to han'; mo' dan we wants, Gawd knows."

The riding lessons had gone well. The rein had been freed from Alice's bridle, yet the Englishman rode at her side. The wife of the master of the place was afraid of lonely woods and long lanes,— so she said. Besides, she was forever chattering. The tongue that was stilled in the big rooms had enough to say in the open to one steady listener, a man inferior to those of her household, yet easier for her to make a companion of and nearer to her kind.

No one noticed when she changed the hour of her ride and took to riding in the long dusk and lingering till it nearly closed to night. It was the hour of magic then; even she, impervious, could feel it.

Something in the scent of the earth when the dew first touched it; something in the stillness of the woods where birds were nesting and in the perfume of wood blossoms and the first white stars above the hill and the stealing of the wind over the breast of the land, — something caused even her shallow heart to ache and stilled her careless tongue.

Ben, awaiting them one night, saw the stars come out above the trees. The locust leaves were whispering in the lane; the fireflies lighted it and the yard and all the sweep of fields.

From out the library streamed a light across the hall and yard. By its source sat Jenifer, absorbing every phrase he read, pausing to think of it, weigh it, and fit it into place, — such a reader as one who writes might fashion, had he the power.

Ben, lounging on the fence, looked across at him. Long-limbed, well shaped, with the grace of unconsciousness; sun-tanned, earnest, with a new look, born of that reading which Ben abhorred, dawning in his deep and glowing eyes. “Lawd,” muttered Ben hopelessly, as he took up his beat in the lane. “Lawd!” He loitered back towards the stables.

Some one was touching a guitar lightly, and he paused to listen. The player was the artist, Ben knew, and touch and song were alike hesitant. While Ben listened the clatter of horses full-spiced was in the lane. Ben ran around too late.

Grame was off his horse, the rein flung loose. One hand tightened on Alice’s bridle; the other was held out to assist her. Ben heard her laugh as she freed her foot from the stirrup, and he saw her face in the beam of light that shone across the yard, — her face, the look of her eyes, and his, as she rested her hand a minute against his shoulder. Neither had seen the negro. Ben threw himself face downwards in the grass.

The strain of the artist had grown more assured, his tones fuller.

Though a hundred songs of the night beat through his mind he would have none of them; though music and mystery rang in every rhythm, he would sing them

not. The mocking-bird, trilling to the night, chose all the songs that he had heard, and lingered on those he loved; the song-sparrow near his nest had but one liquid strain, — and that his own. And because Wheatham must thresh out his meaning for himself, and must feel along words and notes and because the late rose at his door was to the hour what the dream of love was to his heart, he sang:

“The lilies in the gardens dusk  
Blow fair and pale and pure,  
The violets down the woodlands dim  
Spread fair a purple lure;  
And some may breathe,  
And some may wreathe,  
But for me the rose, my love,  
For me the rose.

“The maiden down the darkened close  
Moves proud and pure and still,  
The lady 'long the primrose way  
Sings clear and sweet and shrill;  
And some may bow,  
And some may vow,  
But for me the rose, my love,  
For me the rose.”

## XII

"EUGENIA!" A long, listening pause! "You are coming this week? Saturday, oh! must you? of course! Who are you bringing with you? Fine!" at the list. "Too many? You couldn't bring enough. I want the house full. I am dying to see people, lots, crowds! What hour — Eugenia! Hello! Hello! Eugenia! Yes!" Alice stood listening for a second. "All right," she called with a laugh, "Saturday!"

And it was midweek! Alice hung up the receiver listlessly. For an instant she felt a mad wish that instead of her words she could send herself, or that part of her that thought and saw, along that glittering line which spun by the trees and across the red hills, out to the world. One swift electric rush and then the streets and crowds.

Here the bricks glared in the walks; the heat dazzled above the hills; the haze on the mountains hid the peaks; the sky was filled with puffs of lazy clouds; and the beating of the engine at its harvest threshing beyond the stables rasped her nerves like the throb of a deep note of an organ, too low to be heard, and too strong to be endured.

Alice whirled from the door with a sudden passion at its intolerableness. Ben was crossing the yard to the quarters. "Ben Ben," she called.

"Put the horses to the carriage," she cried before the negro had reached her. "I—I am going into town." It was a sudden mad resolve. Jenifer had often urged her to go. He thought the drive and the shops there might divert her. But after the cities she had known what could a town here hold for her? Alice's untutored imagination pictured the facilities of a cross-roads village. "There are some things I must have by Saturday. I am going now—at once," she called back from the hall. Ben stood rooted by the door, an open-mouthed image of dismay. "I will be ready before you are."

"Hurry," she urged, her foot upon the stair.

Ben, for a moment, did not move. To be carried off on a day of harvest, when the smoke and smell of the engine were in the air, when the wheat ran from the thresher in golden slides; when "Marse Jen'fah," blithe as any hand, worked with them side by side, and even "dat man" was endurable;—to leave this! And cold meat and hot meat, corn-cake and loaf-bread, cabbage and pot-liquor, apple pie and cherry-bread under the big tree by the barn; "An' Marse Jen'fah so proud he fit to bus';"—to miss it all!

"Gawd," he groaned, "some folks is fools. Dey suttently is."

"Dyar, de Lawd be praised." Ben straightened like a dart. His black eyes flashed. Jenifer was striding across the yard. "He's gwine put a stop to all dis tomfoolishness, I knows." Ben waited; but Jenifer did not hurry out to countermand Alice's order. The negro backed the horses to the carriage. Strap to



buckle and buckle to tongue went slow and slower. "Befo' de libin' Lawd," he groaned. Alice stood on the stile, and Jenifer waited by her side.

"Ben is not ready." Jenifer laughed when he saw the state of the horses at the stable door. "Better sit down and wait." He himself swung one foot carelessly from the stile; the other was curled comfortably under him, and on his shoulders, his hat, and in his hair were wisps of straw. "I look like a miller, I know. I feel as if I'd like to be one just to handle such stuff always. You ought to have come out, Alice, as I told you. Why didn't you? You missed it." His delight in the day set him babbling.

Alice stood in the walk, her lace-ruffled parasol above her head, the picture of impatience.

"You must come out to-morrow. We will have another day of it. It's one of the best crops, the best I'll bet, ever raised on this place. I —" he pulled himself up. Jenifer had found some notes as to wheat yield in the old diary. He had been about to quote them: but not to her. He suddenly felt how absurd his interest in the old pages would appear. "There comes Ben," he cried, straightening himself and slipping his hand under Alice's arm as she came up the few steps of the stile.

"Go slow, Ben," Jenifer cautioned. "It's hot, awful, for that long drive." Jenifer had intended to persuade Alice to put off the expedition; but he found her so bent on it that he had not spoken a word of remonstrance. "Take good care of the horses. Alice, you had better get your dinner in town. Cafés?" to



her astonished question, "of course." He told the negro at which to stop. "And come back late in the afternoon," he advised. "I am afraid there is going to be a storm, though," he ended, with an anxious look at the floating clouds.

"A thunder-storm!" Alice leaned out to peer at the sky. In this high land the thunder seemed to roll across the hills which sent it echoing back, low and menacing; while the lightning snapped like a pistol's shot close at hand. Alice dreaded it with a deadly fear.

"Oh, I hope not," Jenifer reassured, seeing the fright in her face. "One can never tell. Alice," leaning again into the carriage, "get all you want, everything. You must have a big time when they all come." What would he not give to see her interested in her affairs as he was in his? And hospitality is right and natural enough to be a law.

"Ben," Jenifer began again, but his intended caution ended in a gleam of humorous sympathy. The negro sat straight and stolid, anger spreading a look of stupidity upon his face. "Good-by," he called instead, and turned away. His hat was over his happy eyes, and the slight blouse of his shirt blew against his belt as he strode on, hurrying back where the thud of the engine beat out a harvest call. Jenifer would have missed it for nothing in his knowledge.

But Alice, who had not set foot in the town, which was their station, since they sped out of it the day of their coming, and who was contemptuous of what she expected to find there, leaned back on her cushions, careless of steep hill or long stretch of road. She was

crowding into her mind every need, fancied or real, of her household and her guests. A lax keeper of her home, she would make up her long neglect in one absorbing whirl.

"You know where the stores are?" she leaned forward to ask, when the hot and wearisome miles brought them to thick-set houses.

"Yes'm," said Ben stolidly. "But we ain't come to 'em yet."

"When you do, drive slowly," she commanded sharply. "I will tell you when to stop."

There was nothing prepossessing in the houses they drove by, the smoke-stacks of a factory, the unpainted cottages, or the rough hill they climbed when Ben turned the horses from the road by which they had entered. But suddenly they were in a long wide street, and it was crowded. A car whizzed past.

"Electric cars!" gasped Alice.

"Dey took de mules off years ago," said Ben without a flicker of expression across his face.

"A soda fountain! Stop." She fairly clutched Ben's shoulder, and loosened her skirts, ready to spring out the moment the horses were brought beside the curb.

"You bettah jes sit still," advised Ben composedly. "Leas' dat's what de swells does." Alice stiffened on her seat. "Somebody'll come 'long out to you an' see what you want. Dyar!" as a young man hurried from the store and came up to them.

Alice gave her order and leaned back when it was filled to sip the foamy stuff luxuriously, to look at the young man who waited with his hand on the awning

pole, and to glance over his head at the shining spigots of the fountain, the heaped fruits on the floor, and the cases on the counter. "You have chocolates?"

"Certainly." The man smiled at her curious manner, but named the favorites and their prices.

The list Alice rattled off made the eyes of the clerk widen, used though he was to an extravagant patronage. "And another glass of soda," she laughed gleefully. "Ben," in sudden generosity, "don't you want something to drink?"

"Yes'm." Ben heard the click of her purse. A sudden flicker lit his black eyes as he turned. Alice held out a dime. He let her lay it on the cushion beside him, and left it in full sight, his solemn glance traversing the amused clerk, the store, the street. "Can't git nothin' now," he said soberly. "Dese hosses is feared o' de cars. Dey's not to be trusted. Ise gwine put dem up fus'."

"Where did this turnout come from?" asked the clerk in a low tone, when the woman behind Ben was busied with her packages.

"De Barracks, sah," with show of satisfaction.

"So!" with quick surprise, and swift, accurate measurement of all, — horses, carriage, mistress — "Long drive for such a hot day," he added carelessly.

"'Tis dat; an' we's got a lot to do. Dribe on?" Ben asked suddenly. Alice was scarcely ready. The young man looked friendly and the atmosphere of the shop was attractive; but Ben flicked at his horses.

The street was filled with the morning shoppers

and drivers who were returning home, friendly groups, shining carriages and laughing, bare-headed, bright occupants.

Alice sat stiff and erect. She was distinctly glad of her silk gown, her big hat, and lace-bedecked parasol; of her sleek horses and their shining harness; and still more glad of the money in her purse, as she went from shop to shop. But she did not see that, beyond those who attended to her wants, — and took their pay for doing so, — she won from none a second glance; nor that when, by Ben's advice, she sent the horses to a near-by livery and ordered her packages sent to "The Barracks' carriage," the effect was not obsequiousness from the merchants, as she had expected, but the fact, accentuated by her many orders, that thus she made herself and the outfit well known.

Thus when on Saturday the carriages, the brake, and the three-seated surrey whirled down the street, the leading team was at once recognized. The visitors in those vehicles were bent on a holiday and were hilarious. The young men swarmed from their seats before the horses were well stopped; the shops were raided; — melons, peaches and candy boxes were flung into the carriages. The laughter was too loud, the cheeks of the hostess were too red, her manner was exuberant.

Alice was amongst the loudest as they took the long way out by well-kept homes and green hedges and long lawns and stately trees. People were on their porches or sauntering down the street or coming from late drives; the hour served to render The Barracks' party conspicuous, as they drove homeward, making

the way gay with calls from carriage to carriage, with words of strange slang and catches of new choruses. The cool of the valleys they dipped into, the beat of the wind when they breasted the hill, the shine of the sunset beyond the peaks, and the low lights stealing across the fields were but strange notes accentuating their freedom.

A young woman, bare-headed, white-gowned, and clear of eyes, holding the reins in a skilful hand, pulled out of their way and sat without a turn of her head as the cavalcade swept noisily by; and it passed many others — men from the mountains jogging homeward, women and children going slowly, or a smart buggy whirling by. The country people were abroad on Saturday errands for mail, buying, and meeting.

It could not have been worse for the new owners of The Barracks. Jenifer's aloofness, his attention to his own affairs, and his reported skill with land and stock had been the strongest appeal he could have made to the world beyond his gates.

The preacher of the nearest church had driven in to see him; the politician most anxious for recruits had made his way down that long lane: and both were grateful for Jenifer's quiet welcome, his clear speech, and his power of steady, alert listening.

The preacher had begged aid for neighborliness from one in his church he knew to be influential, and hoped would prove kind.

He had waited one sunny Sabbath till the last teams had whirled out from the shadowing oaks and only one carriage waited near the door. By that he stood. Be-

hind him the sexton was closing the heavy shutters upon the week's long stillness in the aisles.

"Mrs. Moran," the preacher interjected, "we have some new neighbors."

"We have many," corrected the listener, with an accent which was not favorable.

"Yes, yes." He nodded slowly. "But these — The Barracks' people, you know," he blurted nervously. Mrs. Moran sat silent. "I don't think we are kind enough to these newcomers."

"My dear sir," declared Mrs. Moran whimsically, "if we were, we should find no time for lifelong friends."

"Oh, it's not so bad as that. You seem to like the Markens well enough. They are from Chicago."

"He hunts."

The minister laughed. He knew that was passport. "Perhaps Jenifer hunts."

"Hm!" said the lady with pursed lips.

"Or could."

"That's another matter," quickly. "My dear sir, half the country is in the hands of strangers. From the north, the west, and England we are invaded. Fiction," scornfully, "and advertisement! Fiction has done more to sell real estate in the state than all the advertisements will ever do. We prefer to be less known. And —" her pretended haughtiness instantly disappearing — "to cultivate each other."

"But these people at The Barracks, — I wish you knew them," the minister insisted.

His listener tapped her carriage with an impatient foot; but the preacher was an enthusiast. He had

something to say about his own impression of Jenifer and he knew how to plead in other places than the pulpit.

The lady looked up with laughing eyes when he ended. "Tie your horse to the back of the carriage," she commanded, "and get in and drive home to dinner with me. I couldn't persuade a soul to come to-day. They said it was too hot," she shook her gray head. "If you will, I'll — I'll go," she promised suddenly.

But it was not easy for her to do. It had been long since Mrs. Moran's wheels whirled down that lane; and she recalled slow jaunts, mad races, long walks, and low talks as the carriage rolled on. Her heart had ached to tenderness when she came out across the crested field, and, for the hour at least, the door of her liking swung on its hinges; but as the horses swept under the apple-trees and into the circling lane she gasped.

Under the big mountain-ash at the far side of the lawn stood a table; a siphon was on it, and dark bottles lay in the grass. Chairs were tilted back by bareheaded, bare-armed loungers. A young man lay full length on the ground puffing the smoke of his cigarette in the face of a young woman who leaned above him. Men and women were sitting on the ground. Two tossed a ball from hand to hand and shrieked at their failures. Some one picked on a banjo and half the crowd was shouting the refrain to the music, and a man and woman romped in time across the yard.

Beneath that tree had been built a bench. She, the comer in the carriage, and the child and woman she had loved, the dead, had found it a dear lounging-



place, a corner for whispered confidences and peeps into one another's heart.

"Drive to the stable, and turn around," Mrs. Moran whispered fiercely. "Fast! Ah, there is Mr. Jenifer," a sigh of relief at seeing some way out of the difficulty. "Wait!" as the driver turned the wheels, "I will speak to him. Mr. Jenifer," as Jenifer came instantly and courteously to the carriage and her sweeping glance took in his tall and straight-hipped figure, his ease of bearing, his steady eyes. "Mr. Jenifer" — breathlessly and persuasively — "we have been hearing much — much about your stock; and — and it's a hobby of mine — cattle, horses; both. I thought —" with easier manner of affability — "I would drive in and see; and maybe there are some you — you would be willing to part with."

Jenifer's look and words spoke pleased assent.

"It's a hobby of mine," she repeated, with a nervous glance over her shoulder. Stillness was on the lawn. Alice had risen to her feet and stood hesitant. "We have some fine stock on our own place. Jerseys, we keep; I hear you lean towards Holsteins. Would you show them to me? That is," a trifle haughtily, "if you could leave your guests."

Jenifer smiled and held out his hand for her assistance. He had no more liking for that crowd beneath the tree than had his visitor and no more desire to invade it. "This way," he said, turning his back toward the yard.

"Drive back by the orchard and wait for me there, outside the gate." Mrs. Moran whispered it as she

followed Jenifer, but her tone and eyes forbade her driver to misunderstand.

"Where are the cattle?" she asked quickly, as he closed the gate behind them. "The pasture used to be in the valley behind the quarters."

"It is now. We have changed little."

"I don't know," with a rapid glance towards the high water-tower; but Mrs. Moran could not fail to see that the man who now ruled the place loved it.

She had intended to take the circuit back of the quarters and by the pasture and around the garden in a quarter of an hour. An hour had passed before she put foot on her carriage step.

She had talked cattle to her heart's content and found a listener as enthusiastic as herself and wiser. She had seen Jerseys finer than her own, and she was half-convinced of the values of the Holstein; she had stood by the paddock railing and listened to the pedigree of the colts, and named one which she begged Jenifer to exhibit at the show next year. She had come up by the graveyard, and when she saw its careful keeping the warm words with which she thanked Jenifer came from an impulsive heart, bringing a mist before her eyes and a flush to Jenifer's cheek.

The grasp she gave Jenifer's hand at the carriage door was cordial; but her order to drive on was spoken quickly, and "Faster" she commanded when out of hearing and "Faster" again, as they sped towards the woods.

The trees behind her, Mrs. Moran summed up the hour. "I went to make a call," she told the preacher,

"and I bought a cow; and I shall never go again." And the preacher knew that he need not plead.

The life which had thrown out a tentacle towards The Barracks shrank from it. Swift horses and telephone lines bridged the distances between warm hearts inside the scattered houses, and there was gay life across the hills: but Alice — and Jenifer — had missed a share of it.

### XIII

THE difficulty with the electric light was overcome. A wire ran up the smooth side of the water-tower, and circled its crest with a ring of points which, at night, were glowing, brilliant jets of white fire, flaring into the dark and hanging like a crown from heaven above the hills.

Jenifer loved it. At dusk, under the midnight, at pale dawn, to him it was a visible, yet mystical, sign of blessing. It lighted the hills for his joy; and was his one tawdry whim.

But if the stars shone for him, and he had set a circlet of their similes above him, the light dipped low for some down by the Chowan.

The little teacher had given up her school. She would not even look, at dusk, down the wide level road where the dim light of the short days lingered. Beyond the curve and the woods a man worked in the field, she knew; and the laughter of the children trooping home hurt, because she could not echo it.

She was learned in the lore of her state. She knew the boasts it had begun to make. She read the women's columns concerning chickens and squabs, ducks and bulbs. She saw the promise of sudden wealth which blossomed nowhere else as in print; and it was fine

irony to recall that she might labor earnestly for a year and yet lose by one night's robbery from her roost the precious fowls she had reared. Or to remember that if her muscles had ached to exhaustion over her small fruit rows the berries would have been mush before that slow train had put them at any market: and to recall that such things, allure one as they might, need first strength, then time. All she had of either was first her mother's.

It was useless to read what fold land such as hers would bring when none could be hired to work it; or to understand that the peanut, planted for many years for the children's pleasure, was becoming the staple crop of the county, and a paying one. Who would run her furrows?

The land lay about her. Its riches were for those who bore the master sign of strength; and till by such they were transmuted her acres ran to sedge and swamp and waste.

She must tend her mother, grown an invalid. She must cook and milk; build fires and clean the house; she must chop wood sometimes and work the garden when she could. She must spend half the year in finding a negro to work her land on shares, and the other half in urging him to make enough to pay taxes and give them food. What did the laborer care? He had always enough. Were he hungry there was plenty abroad for fingers that picked not too honestly. She must look at empty rafters where meat should have hung, and do without.

But there was a breath of courage in the girl which

was never beaten out. When she failed she laughed; and when her strength went out of her suddenly — as sometimes it would — she knew it would come again. So that when the ax fell one day out of her inert hands she sat down on a log and leaned back against the rough stacked wood, her hands clasped about her knees, and laughed softly, though her face was white and her figure limp.

When Jack Harrell came around the corner of the house she laughed the more. "I couldn't get up to save my life," she excused her attitude.

"You needn't," he said shortly. "What have you been doing? Bess!" as he saw the hacked wood and fallen ax.

"We have got to have a fire. You don't expect us to freeze with wood in the yard; or for me to let mother sit there by the hearth and not a stick on the andirons. No, indeed," she cried with sudden spirit.

"Where is Joe?" naming the man who should have been working on the place.

"He's sleeping by day and 'possum hunting by night, as near as I can make out."

"He hasn't left?"

"Oh, no! but his work is done, most of it; and the rest doesn't matter to him."

"He gets his own firewood for supplying yours?"

Bess reached a hand behind her to touch the stack.

"He thinks this enough."

"It isn't. It isn't what he agreed to do, either. He was to cut it. I shall see Joe to-morrow. You are not to do this again. I shall come myself and see — and

see — ” Bess was smiling roguishly. “ Oh, I know I can’t watch you; and you will do what you want to.”

“ What I have to do,” she interrupted gravely. “ Don’t fuss over what can’t be helped. How did you come? ”

“ Walked,” shortly.

“ Oh, that is why I didn’t hear you. You — ”

“ Cut across fields. Your mother was asleep, and I came to find you.”

“ Here I am,” she leaned forward, and looked up at him from beneath her lashes; “ and not worth a sixpence,” she added saucily. “ Jack,” with sudden vehemence, “ there are ten commandments, ten. I keep them every one with their ‘ Thou shalt ’ and their ‘ Thou shalt nots,’ all but one, — and that — Envy, you know. No, I don’t want my neighbor’s possessions. I am glad it names the things we must not envy, — oxen and servants and goods within our neighbor’s gates; because there are some other things my neighbor has and I have not, and if they were meant I should be the worst sinner of all.

“ I stopped by ’Liza’s house the other day and saw her arms, great splendid muscles, rising and falling; and she, with the sweat rolling down her face, singing, delighting in her work. If I had such muscles, don’t you think I’d work and be glad to? and as it is — ” She held out her slender wrists tragically.

Jack caught them, and kissed them each between the palms and the loose-fitting cuffs. Bess did not hear the exclamation beneath his breath.

“ Bess, if your mother — ”

“ Don’t speak of her. You know how it is.”



"And mine were not so unreasonable."

"You might as well suppose anything," said Bess, a trifle bitterly. She knew, as well as he, that nothing would ever reconcile the households, neighbors who had never agreed, who had jarred through a generation; and neither could be left alone.

"If they would but consent to live pleasantly together! It would be the best thing to make them," he added savagely.

"I should not like to try."

"Sometimes you can be too thoughtful of others."

"Not of mothers." But Bess might have told which mothers she thought need most care, those who cling and must be clung to, like hers; or who order and will be obeyed, like Harrell's.

"One must think of himself," vowed Jack vehemently. "Bess, for you to live like this, while I — I cannot do without you so long. I had thought —"

"Yes, I know."

"You do not; not half, not half, I tell you. How can I go on living without you, and thinking of you here doing things — things like this?"

The anger in his eyes died at her wistful smile. Her bonnet had slipped back from her head and hung about her neck, her face peeping from it like a rose that slipped its sheath. Her blue eyes were warm and loving and hopeful.

"Oh," the man groaned, "I knew you would never see it; nor anything else but what you call your duty," he added bitterly.

Bess slipped her slender work-hardened hand in

his. Jack remembered when the touch of it had been soft as a rose petal against his palm. "It won't always be this way, Jack," she assured, the pink on her cheek at the thought of what that other way would be.

"No." Harrell leaned nearer, his gaze sweeping her drooped face and bent figure. "No, I couldn't bear it; and I won't." He dropped her hands, and stood up. "I am going to chop this wood. You should not have touched it."

"We must have supper, sir," she flashed.

"Then you go and cook it." He laughed as he looked down at her.

"If you will stay. Will you?" She had sprung to her feet, and her hands were clasped before her. Her voice was coaxing, her glance pleading; laughing, too.

"Not to-night."

"Oh," with a little sigh; and she turned away, pulling at the strings of her bonnet as she went.

"Bess!" Harrell strode by her side, "You want me?" he asked inanely, for the sake of hearing her say that she did.

But Bess did not tell him. She looked up at him with a glance that was as swift as the gleam of a bird's wing.

"If you will not put yourself to any trouble," the man began to temporize.

"No," she assured him gravely.

"And have just what you and your mother would have had."

Then Bess laughed; she was sure of her guest.

"Be careful," she cautioned when he came into the

kitchen with an armful of wood. "You said mother was asleep. Don't wake her. Wait, let me run up and see."

She tiptoed back again. "Sound! And it's the best thing in the world for her. She slept so little last night."

Harrell, after a look around, picked up the water bucket and filled it at the shallow well. He set the tea-kettle on the stove, and crowded the grate with wood. "Now," he vowed, "I shall see you have enough wood to last till Joe gets home."

"You expect to earn your supper, sir?"

"I do," calmly; but Jack still lingered. The fire was crackling, the light leaping out, the kitchen dusky in its corners. Through the pantry door he could see Bess heaping the deep wooden tray with flour.

"Supper will be ready before you are," she warned demurely; and he turned away.

When he had come back, and piled the wood softly in the box, the kitchen was too alluring. Bess worked by the table. A ring of white biscuit with a dimple in the exact centre of each lay around the wooden tray, and the dimple was the impress of her thumb.

"I wish you would make me a little biscuit," he begged, his eyes full of laughter as he watched the deft play of her swift fingers.

"You!" scornfully, as she manipulated the dough, flouring it and her pink palms alike.

"I always thought they would be nice."

"Thought! Haven't you had them, lots of them?"

"Not one."

"When you were a — a little boy? Your mother made them for you?"

Jack almost lied when he saw the indignation of her eyes. "Well never enough," he temporized.

"I shall make you — six!" she vowed gaily.

"With a dimple right in the middle of each?"

Bess whirled. "Go along," she cried, as she brought one floury finger smartly down his cheek.

When the bread was done, the coffee hot, the ham sliced, and the honey set out, with the butter by its side, then the lamplight fell on those two alone and the man stumbled awkwardly over the grace the girl bade him repeat.

How could he be thankful when the very soul of him was bitter? When his prayer was not thanksgiving but a wild plea: "Lord, in Thy might make it possible: bring her to my keeping; grant me to see her thus always, by my board; and soon — soon!"

He saw the tremble of her fingers upon the cups and the flutter of her long lashes when she laughed across at him. And this might be always were it not for their poverty.

His mother bemoaned that she and her daughter must live upon a farm. She had been bitten by fever for the town since she had visited the daughter who lived in one. Money would send her, make her satisfied, and leave him free. The desire for it had begun to embitter his life; and he knew that work as he might the labor of his hands would never support a household a hundred miles away and also that of his own for which

he longed and the thought of which alone made the present bearable.

With this maddening thought was twisted the knowledge that riches greater than any the county knew had once been in his grasp; that down in the solemn woods which had been his was wealth great as that the mountains held; and the gain of them had enriched another. Harrell's brooding upon it did him no good.

He had never spoken what he thought; but now, looking across the table, "Bess," he exclaimed bitterly, "if I had not been such a fool, if I had had sense enough to know for myself what Jenifer found out, all that — that would have been *ours*. It ought to be. I should have it now. He should have told me. It was — it was the deed of a thief. I have been robbed; robbed, I say," he declared more vehemently than he should have spoken.

"No." Bess was white at sight of his agitation. "No, you can't say that. It is not true."

"It is. I know what it is. God, it has come to the point where I can't bear to see the cars piled with that stuff come out of the woods. I feel — If he had but told me. We would have shared, somehow. But to take it all! And for me to let it go! May the Lord forgive me my stupidity, I never can."

"But that's not right, Jack; it's not right. What more could you do? How could you have known?"

"I should have." It was the final word, the crystallization of what he felt. In long hours of hard work he had threshed it out. Jenifer had robbed him. Jenifer had known the value of the land when he bought it;

and whatever the law of the country might be a higher law denied such trickery.

The thought cut into Harrell deep. He was sore for his own loss; and more because he might have saved the woman he loved her hardships, had he been more vigilant. As the price of his stupidity she lived the life she did, while his own was bare and his heart ached for lack of her.

"Jack," she said, slipping around to his chair, her hand like a feather on his shoulder. "You must not think of it so. It is not right. It is —"

"God," was wrung from him, "it is hard."

"What? This?" laughing softly, and stooping to peep into his face.

"This? No, Bess," pulling her fiercely down to him. "I must have you. I am mad because I cannot." Bess nestled still for a moment, the touch of her easing the ache in his heart. Then she was on her feet.

"Dear me, the cows must be fed, the chicken-house locked. Jack — will you — I wish you would do it," she asked breathlessly, her face turned from him. "I —" her hands trembled on the china — "I must wash these dishes."

Harrell stumbled out of the room. When he came back the table was cleared. Bess stood in the door and her eyes were as steady as the stars.

"Must you go?" she asked, as he spoke thickly of haste and things waiting to be done. "Then I am going to walk with you to the gate."

"You are not afraid to come back alone?" Harrell asked anxiously. "It is nearly dark."

"Not a bit," assured Bess gaily.

"You ought to lock the doors and windows fast as soon as it is night."

"I do. They are fastened now, all but this." Bess did not tell how often she shivered behind them. She was afraid of her very shadow.

"Perhaps you had better not go," he insisted. Yet Harrell longed for that saunter with her in the dusk.

"I will, sir."

They went slowly across the level, weed-grown yard. Mulberries were set like marching soldiers down the fence and around to the gate, their branches meeting above it; and their yellow leaves were blown abroad. The moon, swinging above the swamp, made long shadows of the house and chimney-tops, and of the trees beside the gate.

Harrell closed it behind him, and leaned on its bars and looked down at her.

The waving shadows of the mulberries were not altogether bare. The mistletoe clustered thick in the branches, their shadows blurred upon the leaf-strewn grass. Harrell looked up suddenly, and then across at the girl's face; and in a second he had caught the little shawl Bess had flung about her head, and held it at either side, her sunny head prisoned within. So, he kissed her. The mistletoe above them was his pretended excuse.

"That is no reason," Bess panted. "The mistletoe grows here always."

"So do kisses," the young man said.



## XIV

ALICE followed the gay crowd to the city, and flitted home but again to leave it. She filled the house with a Christmas party which was gayer than her summer guests: and again was gone.

Jenifer, seeing that she missed much which he had expected of her and taking her moods with masculine wonder, let her have her way.

The remoteness, the stillness and the sounds that broke it, the short bitter days and the long black nights had been to Alice unendurable. The rutty, bemired roads shut her to the house; and if she would see Grame, she must make opportunity. The guests and her comings and goings had snapped the intimacy of rides and chance meetings. Alice's following of the crowd had been half in instinctive defense from a budding danger; and temptation lurked in the desolation left behind. The woman fled.

Jenifer and Wheatham were ashamed to find that their days had thus been simplified. Each in his blundering fashion had reached out to aid her, and both had failed; Wheatham chiefly because he had come again to the absorption of inspiration and interpretation, Jenifer because of the happy vigor of his life, his silent strength, and that new fascination which claimed the hours he spent within the house.

Her going left each free to follow his own way, — Wheatham to his table and the wistful look towards the peaks when fancy flowed too sluggishly; Jenifer to the joy of the hills in storm and sleet and drifting rain, in clear cold, or folding mists when all the world in sight was his.

If Alice fretted against the loneliness of her life here and if she were happier for a while at her girlhood's home, Jenifer's indulgence abetted her. His sense of protection made him excuse her to Wheatham.

"She doesn't like it up here in winter, you see. I suppose it is — well, cut-off like to her. She has been used to the city. If she were fond of anything to do now," he added helplessly, "sewing or reading. — There are books enough, heaven knows." They were in the library. "If she were, it might — it would be different. All the women I have ever known were busy enough," he floundered. "The only trouble seemed to be they could never find time to do all the things they wanted to do. Still — Oh, well; it doesn't matter, you know. I want her to do what she likes best," he declared stoutly.

Wheatham, in truth, had begun to feel disdain of the listless figure, the dull eyes, and drooping mouth. To have only Jenifer's vigorous content as companion to his dreaming mood was ideal.

"Well, things are different from what you have mostly seen," he began carelessly and cynically. "A woman used to be compelled to work in order to have the things she wanted. Now she need not. What is the use of sewing when some one is waiting and anxious

to do it for you and when you can get half the things you want already made? And pickles and preserves are standing on the store shelves waiting to be bought.

"Fact is, woman has been talking emancipation for so many years that she's got it, only not just the sort she expected," he chuckled gracelessly. "Still she's free, if she pleases. And what is she doing with her freedom? She quotes man as example. The work of the world has so divided into lines that he has got to leave the crossings and keep to one, and trot a pretty good pace on that one, too. For what? Bread and meat, my boy." Wheatham was enjoying his monologue hugely; and it served the purpose of diverting their thoughts from personalities. "Bread and meat; and never were they harder worked for. But woman! Man, what is she going to do with the thing she has fought through two generations for? As far as I can see those who fought hardest, the leaders, battled for a purpose. They knew what they wanted, where they had been restricted. But all these idle sisters in their train!

"'In the sweat of thy brow,'" added Wheatham dreamily, turning in his chair to watch the fire, "'In the sweat of thy brow' — God knew the blossom he put beside the thorn. The Creator's high and unwritten promise which follows on that vow is, 'So doing man shall find joy.'

"Happiness," the monologue went fitfully on, "the world-old, world-wide quest. I found its secret long ago. Do you want to hear it?" — he leaned forward eagerly and peered through the cloud of smoke at

Jenifer. — “It is to do the work you long to do, to breathe the breath of your life into it, to see it live. Just now,” he added with a touch of cynicism, “one must be sure that the Public wants it — and will pay for it.” He threw himself back in his chair. His quick look at Jenifer was searching. Wheatham was not used to talking freely, and he had been saying some things he meant; not talking, as at first, merely for effect.

One tie, and a strong one, between them was that neither he nor the man who listened needed to beat out their thoughts with speech; but that each, divining somewhat of the other, was willing to leave that other to development.

Jenifer, his head thrown back against the cushions of the chair and his long limbs straight before him, was listening silently. The undrawn curtain left in view the moon-flooded and untrodden lane with the drifted fences and snow-cushioned stile. The settling of the snow and the snapping of laden branches made sharp and sibilant sound.

“Tough tramping to-day?” asked Wheatham, as he glanced like Jenifer through the clear-paned windows.

“Tough?” Jenifer laughed. The sting of the snow upon his face, the settling of it upon his shoulders, the sight of the veil drifting down the valley and shutting out the mountains, — Jenifer had not called it “tough.” He had been thinking, as he silently watched the racing flames, of the mystic peaks which guarded the mountain world like gleaming pickets against the moonlit sky and of the sheltered cattle, the housed horses; and

remembering how, flaring out across the snow, the circling lights shone about the tower.

Living — the breath of life alone — seems enough for some. Was it thus, taking God's daily gifts, He meant life to be? If so, man has wandered. Such fret of fear, such tangle of planning, such piling of breaks between him and disasters which never blow, till all his strength has gone in futile work, and that which should have been done with unvexed mind and skilful hand is forever marred, or left untouched.

But Jenifer lived, splendidly, freely, with a hint of broader life and a possibility of firmer grasp. Wheatham had become aware of the roundness of the man's thought and its completeness; and how he envied the quality Jenifer could not guess.

The artist got up lazily, and walked to a book-shelf, fingering the volumes upon it. "Half the time I read," he said carelessly, "I don't care what it is. Something to carry the mind easily along the story's train is all I want, something to ease its own thinking, something — Pshaw! I want to hear the birds sing and see the sun shine, and know that this old world is moving right when I read. As for this pulling out of the heart's strings to hear them twang — Lord, deliver me!

"Half the time a man himself couldn't tell why he did a thing. A hundred reasons, or the total of them all, might move him. Yet the man who writes a tale is wont to insist on only one — and that the purpose of the story; while many a thread is tangled to make the cord. Thank God, the unravelling is not mine. It is hard enough to paint a face, but words — Lord!

"As for you, man," moving restlessly, coming back to the table and leaning across it and laughing at Jenifer's lazy content, "as for you, or what you would do at some unexpected moment, I wouldn't give a guess, a hint; nor could you."

"No," said Jenifer, flushing under the scrutiny, "nor care. What's the use of thinking about it? Sets you wool-gathering. Have another smoke."

In some such fashion the evenings went. Quiet often; words, sometimes; long silences! To Jenifer the winter slipped by like a single magic day. Before he had learned its moods the haze was on the mountains and the green crept through the valleys.

"I must tell Alice she ought to be here. She is missing all this," he declared enthusiastically. Wheatham was following him out of the dining-room. The door of the wide hall was open. The spring-like air blew through, and Jenifer paused for a moment at the door which opened towards the quarters. Blue were the peaks, purplish blue. Bees were humming in the warm air; fowls clucking in the yard. "I must tell her," he repeated.

"When?" asked Wheatham with quizzical look. Jenifer's decisions were sudden and curious. The artist found himself looking for them, and weighing them when they came with an amusement which was sometimes mixed with astonishment.

"To-day will do. Everything will be out in no time. She will miss it all if I don't."

Wheatham recalled the last intelligence of her. The theatre, a dance, new clothes, — gay notes, all of them,

and sounding of the street. How would these weigh, with her, against the blossoming of the spring jessamine or the budding of the lilacs in the hedge?

"To-day," dreamily, "right now." Jenifer walked rapidly up the hall. He stopped by the telephone.

"Better wait till the roads are settled," warned Wheatham quickly as he followed.

"The carriage can get in easily enough. Ben can drive slowly."

"You are not going to call her up now?"

"Why not?" Jenifer saw before him always the one thing which he would do, and he was hindered by no doubt of it. He was ringing the telephone while he answered. Wheatham lingered to listen amusedly.

What he heard was sufficiently simple. The protests were from the other end of the wire. The directions from this end were explicit: and the date and hour selected were of that day.

"Think of staying in the city such a time as this. Man, she ought to see it," with a broad sweep of his hand. The men were on the porch. "The orchard will be in bloom soon," added Jenifer. "Lord, I pity those who miss it."

So did Wheatham; but he pitied, also, the woman who saw it perforce and missed its significance. The artist's quick nature stirred with sympathy for her restlessness when Alice had come. That swaying figure which paced the halls and loitered at the doors and hung from out the windows, and found nothing satisfying from any loophole of her view, was like a weight upon his fancy. He found himself waiting for calm upon



her face before there could be quiet of his pulses and freedom of his thought: and none came; instead, he felt a watchful consciousness of her which he detested.

He wondered at his dismay when he saw her cross the yard one morning to intercept Grame. So far the Englishman had kept to himself; but Alice made the move boldly.

Sunshine of March was about her and it was warm and sweet, with blue sky far above her head and soft airs to woo. Wheatham, through his open door, saw, as always, the notes, the hints of something the woman might have been but never was; and he berated himself for his distrust when her high voice carried to his ears.

Alice asked about her horse; Grame answered briefly. Was the horse in the stable? Had the winds dried the roads? Were they fit for riding? She would try them anyhow; could he go? She named the hour when she would be ready.

Then the light laugh which ended all her speeches! Why had it always rung false to Wheatham? He leaned back in his chair to watch her as she walked; tall, easy of movement, past-mistress in the art of gowning; — and the sunny yard, the waving shadows of budding branches across it — What was amiss with it and with him? Untuned, lowered from the key of his work, his fingers lay inert.

Jenifer, that night, vowed that Alice must ride every day. Her cheeks were already rosy. Soon she would be sunburned and strong. He himself would go with her; if he did not, Grame could. But Jenifer's intentions

settled, through carelessness on his part and purpose on hers, into non-fulfilment. The routine was of the summer—the gallop, the twilight, and the hour of the day.

Now her rides with Grame and her manner were marked. Grame was neither overseer nor groom, and his work was not typical. Although at first he had been ready to assume the manner and garb of livery he was quick, when not called upon to do either, to forget them both. Ready to serve as he had been born and bred, he was yet alert to the standards of a new land; and he had recognized that she who ruled with careless hands the house he served was yet of his own kind. The strength of Jenifer's nature set him apart, above, a master to be served; but Alice, glorified, perhaps, by her setting and made shining by her garments, was of his class. Worst of all, Grame loved her.

He had fought against it sullenly and weakly; and had kept to his quarters when she returned. But Alice, blindly determined upon something which would amuse, had openly reinstated the order she herself had been glad to escape. Once more begun, the old way was easy, and more fatal.

The coquetry of her manner when their horses were on the highroad, the something that he was none too anxious to conceal when the long lane was between him and the man he served, must be apparent; and Alice ignored too utterly those passers-by who seemed unobservant.

The thing wore an ugly tinge. Wheatham, who divined it, and Ben, who knew, were desperate. They

felt themselves traitors to Jenifer in his ignorance; and they feared, with deadly fear, his faintest knowledge. Wheatham, with no whimsical wonder now as to what Jenifer would do, was sure only of the horror of what it would be: and the artist's love and loyalty kept him dumb till he felt he could bear it not an hour longer. But then the end was near.

The riders came over the hill slowly one day at dusk. The orchard's bloom had been scattered across the grass; the locusts were white; the blossoms had died from the lilacs; and green hedges and tall trees made early darkness in the lane.

Alice slipped from her saddle and stood, her habit tight-held about her, looking down at Grame. Furrows of passionate perplexity were on her face; her breath was a long heave at her breast. He, with one searching look at the unlighted house and empty yard, struck the horses sharply. Both, knowing the careless customs of the house, thought themselves unseen.

"Wait a moment," begged Grame hoarsely. "You have not said a word. I — You have promised nothing. Wait!"

Long as the way had been not half had been said. The love that had been slow, at first, strangled, deflected, that had shown but a glance or broken word, had, fostered by the woman's coquetry, gone its way to flood; and it had swept her with it.

Grame was mad in his earnestness and his urging. Flight and England, he pleaded for; and Alice was as mad as he. Lacking just scales and broad balance, she



THE LANE AT THE BARRACKS. *Page 140.*



had coaxed herself to the belief that this alone was love and that she had missed it and been defrauded.

The man's broken words were hoarse and low, the lilacs thick, the shadows heavy. Jenifer, coming up from the garden squares, turned that way and sauntered by the hedge. He walked carelessly, light-heartedly; and the young grass hushed his steps.

The tones of passion breathed through the branches in his very ear. They were what the dusk, the evening star, the perfume of the roses demanded; but who would have thought to hear them here? To whom could such words be spoken? Jenifer was rigid with astonishment, yet laughter twitched at his mouth. Then he heard the voice that answered.

His leap was clear and clean. In one breath, one heat of passion, Grame lay in the grass; and Alice, Jenifer's hand upon her arm compelling her, sped to the dark house, up the black stair, to her room. Jenifer's touch flared the lights in the gaudy, tinselled room which she had bedecked; and as he looked at her in her fit setting Jenifer knew that the fancy he had taken for love had fled. He loathed her. He despised the white face and frightened eyes and whimpered assurances of her innocence. He did not hear them. He grasped the exact significance of what he heard, and knew it for the sequel of the wiles by which he himself had been won and others lured; the end of a coquetry which she had allowed, but whose climax she was too weak to grasp.

"Stay here," he commanded without a glance at her white horror.



Wheatham was shouting his name in the hall. "What is it?" demanded Jenifer calmly, coming down the stair.

"I — The horses," Wheatham panted. "Is any one hurt? The horses — came to the stable — alone." Wheatham cursed himself for his vehemence; but pull himself together, or speak coherently, he could not. His nerves had been too long on edge. He had been leaning on the fence, watching the slow coming of the night, when Ben ran up to him.

"De hosses in de stable; dey's loose dyar; de hosses dey rode. An' de saddles on 'em. An' I don't see dat man nowhars. Gawd's sake, Marse Wheatham, whar is he? Whar is *she*?" And Wheatham had started running to the house. He reiterated his question: "Is any one hurt?"

"He is dead, I think," said Jenifer clearly.

"God! Where?"

"In the lane," and at Wheatham's rush of steps Jenifer turned aside. He flooded with light the hall, the library, every wide room upon the floor; and he was in the hall when Wheatham, shaking, stumbled up the steps of the door which opened towards the quarters.

"Well?" demanded Jenifer sharply.

"He — he —" Wheatham gasped, his breath too short for speech.

"He is dead, I hope."

"He is not. Have you no sense?" catching Jenifer roughly by the shoulder.

The smile on Jenifer's face chilled Wheatham's



fierceness. "Come in here," the master of the house commanded.

The library had come to be Jenifer's room. He took out his check-book now, filled one blank, another.

"You will go to New York to-night," he said to Wheatham evenly. "You will take him —"

"The man is half-dead."

"You will take him with you. This" — as if the paper scorched him — "is his; a year's wages. With this — take what you need. Buy his ticket. Pay every expense. See him aboard the ship. Watch him sail. If ever he puts foot on this side the ocean again I'll kill him. If he should write to her, or seek to have her join him, it will be both. Let him know."

"The man cannot be moved," began Wheatham hotly.

Jenifer hushed him with a gesture. "The carriage will be ready for you at the stables. You start from there in fifteen minutes. You will catch the midnight train. And —" looking him squarely in the eyes, "you will go."

Go! With that half-conscious man beside him, with Ben ashy white in the starlight and his teeth chattering, Wheatham obeyed.

The roll of wheels, ominous in the stillness of the black night, was the last sound but the breath of the wind that the old house heard for many an hour.

The servants, knowing little, slept. The woman up-stairs, feeling God knows what horror of remorse or shame, slept also; but the wide doors were open,

and, white and clear, the lights shone out into the night. White, too, the crown of fire hung above the hills.

Jenifer went from room to room looking about him steadily and slowly, — the dark gleaming floors, the red mahogany, the shining brass, the dim old portraits. The breath of long living was in the house, the hint of history, and the throb of passion. He loved it. But for what had it stood for him? For what did it stand? Treachery! Here had been born the passion whose touch debased his ancestry. Here the woman who was his had listened to the whisperings of dishonor. As he had loved it, he hated it. The white flare of light flickered red before him. If he had had any knowledge of himself Jenifer would have feared his own calm more than any whirl of furious rage.

He could sit and watch the stars. The locusts were luxuries of perfume. A late narcissus gleamed like a candle-flame dropped in the grass. An old and wasted moon came up behind the peaks. Still Jenifer sat, his arm on the window-ledge. A moan of midnight wind stole through the hall, — and a thin blue trail.

He never saw. Feathery and slow its fellows trailed after it. Jenifer watched the shadows beneath the hedge, the tall trees, the clearing light across the fields. Dark, heavy, pungent, a smoke-column rolled through the hall and house; crackling, hissing noises broke out; the quarters, awakened from sleep, set up wild clamor of confusion: and a shriek rang over the railing of the stair.

. . . . .  
From the tower Jenifer watched the dawn. In the

dim duskiess he saw the servants huddled in the yard. Dull smoke rolled above the house-walls and drifted down about them. By him, above his head, the points of light showed yellow in the coming day. The dawn with long fingers stealing through the peaks plucked at the darkness in the vale, and a bird called clear across the fields; Jenifer, from his height, looked down on what the night had hidden and the day lay bare.

## XV

"THERE is a letter on Mr. Wheatham's table." Jenifer's voice was a deadly monotone. "See that he gets it."

"Marse Jen'fah, Marse Jen'fah," Ben cried, his fingers shaking on the harness he was pretending to clean. The cotton jacket and jockey cap which Ben affected gave to his ashy skin and rolling eyes a touch of absurdity. "What is you gwine do now?" he demanded, driven to bay by the horror of that night and day. It had not been twenty-four hours since the mistress of the house had come riding over the hill with Grame. Now — "What is you gwine do?" Ben again demanded.

"I?" Jenifer stood in the dusky stable aisle. His figure loomed tall and tense between the whitewashed stalls. His eyes, dark and expressionless, gazed straight ahead, over Ben's shoulder, and his face was as white as the wash upon the walls.

"I?" he repeated monotonously, his gaze so direct, as if seeing something beyond the negro, that Ben, shivering, turned to peer across the square of light at the wide door.

"Lawd, Gawd-a-mighty!" the negro cried. "Dyar's spooks all ovah dis place. I done heard tell o' dem

hyar, but I nebbah seed 'em. I feels 'em now. De hot air blow 'roun' me all de way up from de pastu', puff, puff, right in my face, an' dat's de bref o' de ha'nts you can't see. Sumpin done loose 'em hyar. Ise feard, Marse Jen'fah, deed I is; Ise feard."

Jenifer stood with the sound of the negro's voice in his ears, but he understood not a word. .

"An' now — " Ben stopped short. The harness rattled to the floor, and the negro clung to the nearest stall; but he could say not a word, Jenifer stood so straight, and his face was set like a mask. All day Ben had feared him worse than he feared the ha'nts.

The negro remembered that race, long past the black still midnight, across the hills, jolting, jarring, the red sparks flying beneath the horses' hoofs; and the burst of far-away red flames that licked into the sky. Ben knew where they burned. Through the smoke's drifting, sometimes above it, he saw a crown of fire shining serene and clear into the night.

He remembered his reeling horses in the lane; the huddled servants in the yard; and, at Wheatham's door, white, fear-stricken, Alice!

Jenifer was nowhere; nowhere, though Ben's wild gaze searched for him.

The negro's tongue had cloven to his mouth when he stumbled over the carriage wheel. His leaden feet would scarce drag him to the gate. The clang of it behind him set his nerves jumping in his icy, fear-paralyzed body; and close upon the sharp sound he had heard a voice, clear and calm, and calling from above.

Ben fell to his knees: his shaking fingers covered his face. "Marse Jen'fah" was dead. His spirit was calling.

"Ben!" kindly and reassuringly, and a commonplace question was added.

Ben looked up to see Jenifer coming down the rungs of the spiral stair; but the negro was not a whit ashamed of the terror he had felt.

And that day! The housing of the furniture that had been saved; the coming of awed neighbors, and their futile offers of belated help; Jenifer's calm mastery of the household and of them; the fallen chimneys, the reeling smoke; the low reckoning of damages the neighbors made. The sturdy walls had well resisted. Fallen chimneys were on one side, the roof toppled in to ruin, floors scorched and blackened, windows burst; and the acrid smoke filled yard and quarters, and rolled beneath the stable rafters.

Ben had been at Jenifer's heels when he strode across to the arcade before Wheatham's door and stood looking at Alice cowering on the step which led to the artist's room.

"I think you had better go home," Jenifer had said. Alice had started at the word and the way in which it had been used. Never before with Jenifer had it meant any place but this. Now he had emphasized it meaningly. Her frightened eyes had sought his and questioned him. "There is no way of making you comfortable here," he had said coldly.

Ben had put the horses to the carriage which bore the mistress of the house to the station. He had stood

watching them, Jenifer straight on the seat and driving like the wind, and Alice, with face hidden behind winding veils, huddled on the cushions behind him.

Ben knew of the long stern silence between those two. He did not know that it had been broken neither on that gray, smoke-thickened dawn, nor in the clear light that lay upon the long road; that there had been neither accusation nor defence. Once Jenifer in that interminable drive had turned to say:—"You will find money in the Calvert bank on which you can draw," and he had named a sum which was twice the value of the house the deed to which was hers. "The interest of it is at your disposal," he had added significantly.

Then, when Jenifer had returned, Ben had followed him from field to pasture, from wood to paddock; and there was a finality in Jenifer's directions which had kept Ben dumb till this hour.

"Marse Jen'fah," he pleaded now, "whar is you gwine?"

Jenifer shook his head. "I don't know," he said. His voice was low and hoarse.

"You — you gwine to *stay*?"

"Yes."

"Jes fer a little while? You'll come back to-night?"

"No."

"To-morrow?"

"No."

"Den Ise gwine too. Ise gwine stay hyar not a day longer. I hates an' 'spises dis place," in sudden passion.



"De ha'nts is aftah it, an' dey can hab it. Ise gwine too."

"Where?"

Ben was routed. "Some — somewhar," he stammered.

"Ben, do you want to go? Are you tired of it?" Jenifer's inflectionless voice softened to kindly tones. "Would you rather go back? Leave? Is it — Do you really want to go?"

"Want to go away? Want to go whar?" Ben fairly blubbered. "Ain't no place on Gawd's earth I wants to be but hyar — when you is hyar — an' when — Gawd, Marse Jen'fah, ef you jes wouldn't look lak dat!"

"Who would look after things? and take care of Hector and Dandy and Lady Blue?" Jenifer's lips twisted into a smile as he named Ben's favorites. "What would become of them? Wheatham will be here," he added. "But if you don't want to stay —"

"An' we was gwine enter Lady Blue fer de ribbon dis fall! She'd 'a' took it sho."

"There is no reason why you should not enter her."

"Who's gwine do it?" Ben's flaming interest burned out a fraction of his agony.

"You. Wheatham will tell you what to do."

"An' train her?" Delight peeping out of the corner of his eyes.

Jenifer nodded his assurance.

"Lawd!" Ben's laugh was short. The sound of it startled himself. "Who's gwine ride her?" he anxiously demanded.

"I don't see why you shouldn't."

"Me!" falling back against the stall, and his teeth a shining row. "Ride Lady Blue at de show! Go 'long, Marse Jen'fah. Guess ef I trains her I'll have to train myse'f too. Ise gettin' fat dese days," he chuckled. "Leas'ways I was," pulling a solemn face.

"Take good care of her and do the place and yourself credit. And look out for Mr. Wheatham all you can." Jenifer spoke absently, as if his thoughts were far from his words. He took a step towards the door, and caught Lightfoot's bridle in his hand.

Ben sprang before him and stood in the square of light, his hands spread wide and flung above his head. "You ain't gwine so, Marse Jen'fah? You ain't gwine, an' nobody knows whar, an' nothin' 'bout it?"

"I must." Jenifer's hand kindly put the negro aside. His look seemed to reassure, and, as the negro leaned limp against the door, Jenifer sprang into the saddle, sat for one still moment gazing upon blackened house and trampled yard, at red hills and sweeping mountains, then rode slowly and unquestioned along the circling lane, past the orchard, over the crest of the hill.

Behind him was the love of the old house which had mounted to worship; behind, the valleys and silent woods; the content; the dawn of higher things; his home, his wife, and all his past. What was before he neither cared nor would direct.

Lightfoot paced daintily through the wood and lane, and the broad red highway stretched hard before them. The only twitch Jenifer gave the reins was to turn her from the town. It was nearly dusk when they rode

out of the winding lane, it was dark when they reached the road. Jenifer would have no man see him, and would himself see none; no one now would know him in the wide black way.

The stars were in the east, above the peaks behind him; and towards the west was wilder land; and beyond it higher mountain-tops. Where they brushed the sky was wilderness impenetrable, and in its fastnesses was a scattered folk unknown, proud, distant, and disdainful of the hills and valleys at their feet. Those piercing peaks had allured Jenifer's boyhood. The mystery of the unexplored and the wild tales whispered of them made them now a refuge.

Close as their blackness massed against the darkening sky, the peaks were far. Jenifer went slowly, the reins on Lightfoot's neck, following the broad deserted road till towards dawn he came upon a way which led straight west and up.

It was quickly light, the early dawn of a late spring day, and, resolved that no one should see him or know where he went, Jenifer pulled aside where a stream crossed the road between steep and deep wooded hills, and sent Lightfoot splashing up it. The horse was thirsty, but her rider kept her head high till a curve, and another hid them, and beech and chestnut and oak dipped across the way, and alder and bramble made a thicket by the brook's rocky bed. Then he slipped wearily from the saddle. It had been two nights since he slept. With Lightfoot following he climbed to dry earth; and when Jenifer had tethered her in a dip of the woods, where a trickle of moisture

fed rank grass, he threw himself down on the leaves the dew had not touched — so thick were the boughs above — and he was asleep before the sunshine stole through the branches. Warm and soft and pure the air blew about him; dreamless, motionless he slept, and eased the madness of his passion.

When he awoke it was dark. Lightfoot was whinnying softly and uneasily; and when Jenifer stood for one still moment, his arm upon the horse's neck, and looked down the dim wood in which night deepened, a thrill of expectancy wakened in him. He had put the deep forgetfulness of sleep between that night and this, as one puts miles behind him when he travels between far severed points; and he was as ready for this night as the traveller is for strange discoveries. Toward such he went. He knew it as the road grew steep and narrow, winding and rocky; as it lay deep shadowed, narrower and rougher, and Lightfoot slipped upon worn stones. But he was not aware that Lightfoot had turned aside from the road and struck a trail. He saw how steep it climbed, how wild was the black earth on either hand, and how the peaks seemed to tower at his side and to touch the skies. Lightfoot had taken the rougher way into a pocket of the peaks.

Where the hills opened, as if for gateway, ran a level tree-set place. Beyond the orchard towered taller trees. Jenifer caught the gleam of a light, and heard the rushing of a stream, but the way wound so steep that he slipped from his saddle and climbed the path by Lightfoot's side.

Up, on either hand, ran the circling mountains. They shut him close in amongst their peaks and brawling streams and wild rocks and black woods. The way closed behind them as they climbed, and all the earth was this dark hollow in the towering hills, and all the sky the star-set blue which caught upon its crests.

It was a shock to his exhilaration amidst the savage loneliness to catch a sudden shout, to lose it, to hear again a loud singsong, and to see the shimmer of a light above him.

He lost it and the sound, as he climbed; but the light flickered down through thick branches, where they came out higher, and he turned Lightfoot's head towards it. Slipping on mossy stones and over rough earth, the dew-wet leaves slapping his cheek, Jenifer pushed on. A boulder hid the light, and before he rounded the mass of stone a strong voice rolled again into the night, a voice in prayer. Earnest, exultant, beseeching, in wild and superstitious terms it pleaded and ended.

Jenifer coming nearer saw a flaring torch beneath a rough, strange shelter. A tall, straight, fiery-eyed man towered beside the light. A few people stood before him and he lifted his hands as if in blessing.

Astounded, the watcher waited till the short words were spoken and the people scattered. He could hear their slipping steps and the crashing of the branches through which they pushed. The man who had led them had not followed. He stood still and rapt. Rotting rafters were over his head, rough supports for the

roof about him; and at his feet broken and twisted pipes of iron and decaying wood.

Jenifer stepped into the light. The preacher turned at the unexpected sound and they stood, measuring one another by the flaring, wind-blown light. Tall and straight fashioned were they both; slow of speech, unless moved by stormy passion, it might be guessed; firm of mouth each was, and stern of glance. The flickering light showed the preacher's face most plainly. Jenifer — and Lightfoot behind him — were limned against the night.

"Whar did you come from?"

That primal question Jenifer did not mean to answer. He stood silent.

"Are you lost?"

"No," assured the stranger calmly.

"Know your way 'bout here?"

"No."

"Hm!" with a lightning glance and measurement.

"Trying to cross the mountains?"

Jenifer laughed. The queries were so sharp and blunt.

"Not to-night," he said carelessly.

"Tired?"

"Not much."

"Nowhar for you to stay 'round here. What in the nation possessed you?"

"I am not anxious about a place to stay. This will do as well as any."

"This! You know what this is, what it was?" with something of the wild inflection of his preaching.

"A still! A still! One of the las' the law put down. Here, where the people come to sell their souls, I come to save them. Every man in the Hollow, I've got them all; an' I fight the Devil for 'em here, right here, whar I've seen 'em layin' dead drunk. Talk 'bout payin' license, thar's no license for sech as I've seen. An' we've got shet of it. Yes," to himself; and then stepping down and nearer, and looking keenly at Jenifer. "What's your name?"

"Wooten," said Jenifer quickly.

"Wooten!" The old man stood for a second agape. "Wooten!" He snatched up the torch and strode nearer to the stranger. The light fell full on Jenifer's face. His eyes looked squarely back, and calmly and steadily. Suddenly the preacher quenched the light. "So is mine," he said shortly. "Come on home, son!"



## XVI

"WANT anything to eat?" The old man stood at his unlocked door. "Had any supper? Lan'!" at Jenifer's answer and his short laugh. "Turn your horse loose; he'll find all he wants, water an' grass; an' come 'long in, in the lean-to." The last syllable was strongly accented.

"Name o' Goshen, whar is the lamp?" as he stumbled over a chair. "Here! here 'tis!" The preacher lighted it, and, opening the door of a tin safe, stood peering at the half-filled shelves. "Ain't much here; but if you're hongry — well, you can't starve. Corn-pone," — he set it out, — "meat" — cold, and in a platter of hardened gravy — "molasses," with a flourish. "Set to! Help yourself. Lan'!" with a laugh that echoed up the gorge, "a hongry man is none too pertickler. Hold on. I'll get some milk; plenty down in the run."

The old man was gone. Jenifer could hear him slipping and sliding down the steep rocky path, but he waited for nothing. He was starved.

"Gosh-a-mighty!" laughed Wooten at the door. "Help yourself! It makes me hongry to see you eat." He filled a thick mug with foaming milk, and then another. "B'lieve I'll draw up myself. Milk an' pone an' meat, 'tis good sho," he vowed as he sliced

the hard bread with his pocket-knife, and speared at the cold meat in the dish. "It certainly does taste good."

Jenifer ate ravenously. The small smoked hand-lamp threw a feeble light upon the rough table. The dull gleam showed the young man's face, white, worn, yet with an odd look of exultation on it, and the preacher's, on which the exalted fierceness of the meeting in the still yet lingered.

For the old man such gleams were fitful, and apt to be quenched to a steady light of jovial, lazy living. The sins against which he passionately lifted his voice at such high moments were wont to seem matter of course to him in his every-day life; and the one against which he most raged might have been said to be condoned by his own habits.

The lean-to had for its roof split chestnut saplings running from the logs of the inner cabin, in which they fitted, spreading fan-wise outward from a central point to lower boarded sides. Boards and saplings should have joined but did not, from their rude putting together; and above the boards ran a rough shelf beneath the eaves. Contrivances of all sorts were hidden on it, — an ax-helve, a powder-horn, drying gourds, red peppers, brown tobacco leaves, and amongst them a squat gray jug.

The old man felt no qualm of conscience as he fumbled for it, and rinsed his mug and poured into it a drink browner than the milk. "Have a tetch?" he asked hospitably. "Lan'!" at Jenifer's astonishment, "you're thinkin' 'bout what I said back thar. Well

now," straightening himself and looking with humorous glance at his stranger guest, "you see I ain't sayin' a word 'bout a little, jus' a little, bought fair and square, an' kep' for comfort. No, sir; 'tis makin' a dog-gone fool o' yourself I preach against, an' spendin' the money that ought to be buyin' meat an' clothes for your family."

"Are you married?" asked Jenifer hastily.

"Not now, not right now," the old man answered sheepishly, his head turned somewhat aside.

Jenifer breathed freely. He wanted solitude; beyond all, a womanless solitude. "Living by yourself?" Jenifer, his hunger satisfied, pushed back his plate and leaned across the table, looking at the man who had befriended him.

The preacher had still a spoonful of red liquor in his mug, and he pushed the heavy china back and forth on the table with awkward hands. "Looks like it, don't it?" he fended. "Got enough? Can't eat no mo'?" he asked suddenly. "Won't take a drop?" his hands on the jug. "Time to smoke then. Lan', I'm glad you will! Seems like you don't know what sort o' fellow a man is till you've seen him smoke a pipe. If he's forever jerkin' at it an' puffin' the smoke out in little squirts, that man is braggy an' pepper-tempered, always goin' to do more than anybody else, an' never doin' nothin'." Wooten was moving heavily about the room, searching for his pipes and reaching for the tobacco leaves. "If he jus' sets an' lets his pipe hang out o' his mouth till it's fairly gone out, he's too darned lazy for any good. But when a man has et his meal, an' sets down for a good smoke, an' sees the

tobacco red at the top o' the bowl an' the smoke curlin' steady up in the air — Lan', 'tis good. 'Tain't never been tetched!

"Here's a pipe," the old man added in a tone of satisfaction. "I whittled the pith out o' the cob an' cut the reed myself. Fill up!"

Wooten settled himself comfortably on the log step, and Jenifer threw himself on the hard earth beside it. The night was cool, but not chill to them. The brawling of the streams and the singing of the wind down the steep mountainsides filled the Hollow with soft sounds. In the starlight Jenifer could see the clearing, the rough cabin, the low shelter for cattle near it, and the small garden patch.

The preacher seemed to have seized on the only space between the peaks, a slope bounded by rocky streams. One stream they had crossed, springing from stone to stone, to reach the cabin; the other foamed over the boulders beyond the hut; and the mountain seemed to rise straight and sheer from stream to stars. No light twinkled on the close-set peaks, nor was a sound heard from the steep dense woods. Jenifer wondered where there was room for the folk he had seen to live. He asked Wooten.

"Here and thar," answered Wooten carelessly. "Lots o' room. Seems like you can walk straight up these sides, now don't it, son? an' 'tis clear two miles up the Hollow till you get to the droppin' off place, an' two miles down to whar you turn in to get here; yes, sir, spite o' the way she'll deceive you some clear mornin', like a woman, when she gets a chance, beckonin' you

on, an' promisin' 'tain't noways you got to come, or nothin' you got to do; an' the faster you go, or the harder you work, the farther both are." He chuckled at his speech, and drew harder on his pipe.

"Room here, plenty o' room," the old man repeated, watching Jenifer shrewdly, "an' ain't nobody goin' to bother you in it. No, sir. 'Long 'bout 'lection time some man might fin' his way up here — but I manage that myself, the 'lections; they done come to leave us mos'ly alone. An' that's 'bout the only face you see what don't b'long here, right here in the Hollow." He nodded encouragingly to Jenifer.

Wooten was well used to crime. He had seen murder done and the man who committed it go free. For theft he had scarce a name, the deed was so common, the petty pilfering from neighbor to neighbor. Stealing was a big word, and an awful thing.

If Jenifer fled from the consequences of any rash act, as the preacher thought, he had found refuge. He himself, who ruled the Hollow, would see to it; for Wooten had instantly, and strongly and impulsively, liked the clear-eyed, still-lipped man who had faced him steadily beneath the flaring torches at the still; and he would have sworn to his rightfulness, if not to his innocence. The law of the Hollow, and its judgments, was primitive.

The name, too, the old man thought, was strange and it held for him a whimsical attraction. None bore it in the Hollow but those of his kin; and amongst them was a legend of a Hessian officer of wild life and deeds foregathering with an outlaw's daughter, and

living and dying in the windings of the gorge. It pleased the preacher to steal furtive glances at Jenifer's long straight limbs — such were his own; — at the young man's thick black hair — such his had been; — at Jenifer's clear cut face propped by his elbow in the grass.

"These here nights," — the old man began slowly, after long and silent musing, "seems like a shame to sleep an' lose 'em. Air so sof' an' sweet, sort o' like — sort o' like honey when 'tis good an' fresh, an' you fairly taste the blossoms in it. An' then the days," laughing softly, "you couldn't miss *them*. An' if you want to be up an' have a look at to-morrow, good an' early — well, I 'spect we'd better be gettin' 'long to bed, son. Lan'!" for Jenifer, his head upon his arm, the pipe between his fingers in the grass, lay sound asleep. "Son," the old man repeated, leaning to touch him lightly, "'tis time to go to bed."

"I hope you slept as well in the bed as you did in the yard," Wooten asked in the morning.

"Sound as a top," Jenifer asserted.

"What you goin' to do to-day?"

"The Lord only knows." Jenifer stretched his arms above his head, and Wooten laughed.

"Well, I don't know 'bout myself," he vowed. "Thar's nothin' right to han' this minute; but thar'll be plenty, plenty befo' the day is done. An' first thar's breakfas'. I ain't no han' much at cookin'," he warned.

The old man was right as to his kitchen skill. The soda biscuits, made in honor of his guest, were streaked and sodden. The eggs he had striven to poach so that "the whites and yellows sot straight" were broken

to uninviting fragments; the coffee had the color of the mountain stream in its shallows.

"Fact is," the preacher acknowledged, as he reached up to the shelf beneath the eaves, "I ain't much used to doin' without women folks."

"Thought you said you lived by yourself," said Jenifer quickly.

"Thought I was an ol' bach ; lan'!" The old man's sniff was indignant and defiant. "Well, I am jus' now," he added plaintively.

"Come 'long," he called in despair when they had tried to straighten up the room and table; "'tain't no use fussin' here no longer. We couldn't get things lookin' like — like they ought to be. Shucks! it don't matter nohow. I'm goin' down the mountain a piece to see 'bout some wood; want to go?"

Jenifer was ready.

With the sunshine stealing through the peaks the young man could see what the night had hidden; — how thick the locusts grew on the steeps, drooping their clustering blossoms beneath their flickering leaves; how brown showed the new leaves on the oaks; how thick the chestnuts grew, how tall the hickories and poplars; how rank were the ferns that brushed their feet; and how amongst them and the grass flamed indian pinks, scarlet and broad-lipped and thick-clustered — glowing fire betwixt the green.

The path struck the trail Lightfoot had followed. "This is the way you come in," the old man said laconically. "Wonder how you found it." He was still curious, but Jenifer was silent.



"Thar's whar Hutchins lives," pointing to a cabin clinging like a nest far up the mountainside; "an' that path goes up to Stith's. See that peak up thar, between the trees? That's Shiflet's."

"Who lives there?" asked Jenifer quickly, as a cabin showed down the trail. It was on the right, on the same slope on which Wooten's cabin stood, a tongue of land between two streams and broadening as it fell.

"Whar?" Wooten's hand running up the back of his head tilted his hat further over his eyes, an awkward gesture of embarrassment. "Thar? Nobody."

"Who owns it?" demanded Jenifer suddenly.

"I s'pose 'tis mine."

"Want to rent it?"

"To — what?"

"To let anybody live in it?"

"Well, that depends on who 'tis; mos' people I don't want thar. No, sir. Ain't nobody lived in it for three years. But I look after it, an' —"

"I want to see it," said Jenifer tersely, as he struck a way through the willows and across the rocks, Wooten following with slow reluctance.

The cabin had its twin in the house, the lean-to, and the shelter above them. Beside it sang the stream and beyond the water towered the peak. It looked as if the hut had dropped to the bottom of a cup of greenness through which the waters sang and the winds stole and over which the sky shone, all for that one cabin far beneath its sheltering rim.

"Who lived here?" asked Jenifer quickly.

"I did." Wooten moved his head, embarrassed, and looked at everything but Jenifer's eyes.

"How long ago?" forgetting that Wooten had already told.

"'Bout three years."

"What made you leave it?"

"Well, Susan — You see I couldn't 'gree with her; an' so I got Mehitabel an' — an' I moved up the mountain."

"What?" Jenifer was open-mouthed and incredulous.

"'Twan't no use tryin' no longer," Wooten defended. "I jus' couldn't put up with her nohow. She was a-wearin' me out," he vowed in sudden heat of passion; "an' I was afraid o' her, 'fraid o' what I might do to her. She was so pizen mean." Jenifer turned suddenly, his cheek white, his look on the distant peaks.

"I jus' was blegged to leave her," the passionate voice drawled on. "An' I couldn't live by myself nohow."

"Didn't you know — " began Jenifer's stifled voice.

"Know what? I knew I was 'blegged to do it."

"But to stand up and preach!"

"Why shouldn't I? Gawd-a-mighty! is thar a man in this Hollow will stan' up an' tell me why I shouldn't?" Wooten's eyes were blazing, his clenched fists menacing. "Didn't I take care o' her? Didn't I look after her after I lef'? Didn't I leave her everything, house, garden, everything, an' jus' strike out for myself? Didn't everybody know I took care o' her till she took up with another man?"

"Where is she now?"

"She's done moved across the mountain."

"And the other?"

"Dead; been dead a month or so," Wooten added softly.

"Is that all, all of your wives?" asked Jenifer, intending a thrust.

"Thar's one mo'," said the old man simply, "jus' one mo'. She's livin' down thar," pointing to a chimney showing above the willows.

"Lord!" Jenifer groaned, afraid to laugh or scoff or argue, the old man, his flash of anger past, was so serene and unquestioning of the wisdom or right of what he had done. "She's got the children with her," he added composedly, "all I ever had. Susan an' Mehitabel they didn't have none. Though I've heard tell as how Susan had 'em now, two or three of 'em.

"You see —" still standing straight, his hands in his pockets, his hat on his eyes, his bewhiskered chin thrust forward, his blue eyes lazily half open, "I started down thar," with a nod towards the cabin below. "I was jus' growed up then, an' I used to spree considerable; yes, sir, pretty considerable. An' Mary she got tired of it. I don't blame her, not a mite. I sho was wuthless. An' she — she drove me out. Said she was tired o' me an' my cussedness!" A dull flash was on the old man's lean face even now when he recalled it. "That's what she said. An' I lit out. Come up hyar; an' after awhile I set up with Susan. An' she — I couldn't stan' Susan nohow, an' I jus' put out again. Then thar was Mehitabel," he added simply.

"I ain't never done spread any since Mary drove me out," he went on. "An' I took to preachin' an' standin' up against it, an' against everything else the devil is a-pushin' along —" a sudden flare of the zealot in his eyes and the singsong inflection of a voice used to shouting in the open.

"An' —" Wooten broke off and came back to his simpler commonplaces. "Mary was thar las' night. She come to hear me preach. She had the children with her. She'd come, yes; but she don't let me do a thing for her nor them. An' they's my children, all I got. She don't let 'em set foot in my do'; an' me — I ain't crossed hers since — since — Thar she is now!"

Wooten's calm assertiveness had faded. "Mary," he said awkwardly, as a woman parted the willows and came out in the little clearing, "Mary, here's a new-comer. His name's same as mine — Wooten."

The woman looked at Jenifer searchingly. She was brown-eyed and large, with cheeks that had been freckled in her youth and hair which had been red. The freckles had faded and the soft skin was wrinkled like cream which has stood too long within the bowl. The hair was like burnished copper.

"Goin' to stay?" the woman asked suddenly.

"Yes." Jenifer smiled at the calm directness.

"Whar?"

"Here." Jenifer's hand was upon the door behind him.

## XVII

"SON," drawled Wooten, "you're mighty well fixed, 'clare to goodness if you ain't. An' you didn't lose no time about it."

Jenifer laughed at the old man's ready appreciation. "It was easy enough," he assured. "Everything was here all right. All I had to do was to clean up."

The old man, with his curious logic, had left Susan's furniture untouched, or "the heft of it," as he would have said. "Well, you sho done it," he said slowly.

The vigorous work had been the breath of life to Jenifer, who longed to think of nothing, to remember nothing, only to do; and morning after morning, evening after evening, Wooten had sauntered through the locusts and alders and willows fringing the middle clearing to see what had been accomplished. The old man, afflicted with mountain laziness, marvelled at Jenifer's energy.

"Well, it looks good." Wooten sat down on the low step, and leaned his elbows on his knees. "It certainly does. All the weeds done pulled up, an' the grass so soft an' fine it sort o' makes you feel good an' springy to put your foot on it; an' the roof patched up; an' whitewash inside an' out; an' smell! I always did like the smell o' lime, like — like — lan', I don't

know what 'tis like, 'less 'tis the smell o' woods after the rain's been beatin' 'em; clean an' sort o' sweet, you know."

He settled back contentedly. Jenifer was in the lean-to, but the old man knew that the younger heard his disjointed sentences and listened in his taciturn fashion. The preacher himself was in no talking humor, and his broken sentences had been but a braving out of his mood. He had been sick with loneliness up in his far cabin, and now, with Jenifer near, settled into contented silence.

Close and sheer, nearer than to his own house, the mountain rose behind the hut, the thick trees and dense bushes making a wall that ran dark and steep, afar off; but near was a shield of stealing shadows and sifting lights, filled to its dim distances with lispings sounds. The stream brawled loud upon its rocks; a locust grew near the door; indian pinks flamed in the grass; a willow thicket hid the path that dipped downward. The way showed that it had been trodden, for the grass was flat upon it, the ferns crushed, and the branches broken.

"Ever see Mary?" the old man called through the door. He had often wondered, but never before had asked.

"Yes," answered Jenifer laconically.

Wooten shifted his shoulder against the door-frame. The cleaning inside the cabin, the scrubbing, the piling of the black fireplace with green pine boughs looked like a woman's work, like hers; yet he had never seen her there.

Jenifer whistled as he went about the lean-to. He had been neither desperate nor unhappy since that awakening in the woods when the thrill of expectancy had shaken him. To hide himself had been instinctive. The beast most ignorant and lowest in the scale of life knows how to shield itself when its skin is first cast; and the beating of the flood was yet too near for Jenifer, the beaten, to know where he had been tossed, or what path he might find. He but drew breath and strength. He bided.

Already the peaks were beautiful to him, the stream musical, the stars friendly. What they would give to him he would learn slowly and unconsciously; now it was buoyancy, a stir, not of hope, but of hopefulness. "Wooten," he called from the lean-to, "come on. Supper is ready."

"Lan', you don't say so." Wooten moved slowly. "'Tain't sundown yet," throwing back his head to look above the peaks.

"'Tis supper-time anyhow: come on!"

"Lan'," cried Wooten again at the lean-to door. "Lan' o' Goshen!" he intensified his expression. "This looks something like. Thought you said you wa'n't no cook."

"I am not. Sit down. Help yourself."

Wooten reached for a biscuit. They were brown and light, and cold. He opened one, spread the soft butter on it, and bit into it, half of the creamy disc at a bite. "Um!" he munched. "Um!" Suddenly he pushed back his plate and his eyes flashed behind his heavy lids. "You made 'em?"



"Didn't say I did," answered Jenifer easily. "Have another?" pushing the plate nearer his guest.

"I know who did," the old man flared.

"Yes?"

"Mary! 'Tain't no woman on the mountain can cook like that, no woman but Mary."

Jenifer was eating heartily. The hour was cool and on the little stove in the lean-to the teakettle bubbled, and the red embers shone through the rusty grate. "She's cooking for me," he announced calmly; "doing most of it. Sends her boy up with it."

"Hm!" the old man snorted.

"I pay her for it," said Jenifer, seeing Wooten's angry uneasiness. "And she needs the money," he added mercilessly.

Wooten sat silent, his plate empty before him.

"Clothing three children and finding enough for them to eat is no easy job."

"I always wanted to help her, always; but she wouldn't take a thing. I bought her a dress last Christmas. Mehitabel helped to choose it: and Mary sent it back."

Wooten missed the flash of amusement in Jenifer's eyes. He was looking wistfully at the biscuit. "Mary always did make good bread." His big hand stole towards the plate. "Susan she flung 'em together so as they'd scarcely stick, an' the lumps inside o' them was worse than a feather bed when it ain't been beat; an' Mehitabel she streaked hers up so with soda till they made your tongue feel soft in your mouth, an' the water run down your throat same like 'twas soaped. But Mary —" The old man piled his plate.

"An' bile a ham! She can't be beat," he added. Then, as he ate, "This honey came from the back of the garden patch. Yes, sir; I know the taste. I put the hives there myself. Son," he ended, "I ain't eat no such meal since — since the Lord knows when," he caught himself. "You're mighty fortunate, mighty fortunate," he declared as they lighted their pipes before the door.

"Yes, I think so," said Jenifer soberly.

"Son," after a long pause, and taking his pipe slowly from his lips, "son, is you worth much?"

"Powder and shot," declared Jenifer with sudden bitterness.

"Shucks! What you gettin' at? You know what I mean. Have you got much money?" he insisted curiously.

Jenifer flushed hotly. "I have some — some that I brought with me," he stammered; "and not a cent more," he added sternly. Jenifer's instructions to the bank had been as explicit as those to Wheatham; and he had cut loose from both.

"I shall have to look out for some corn for my horse," said Jenifer quickly, breaking the awkwardness of the silence. "Grass is not good for her all the time. Do you know where I can get some?"

"None in the Hollow, not this time o' year. If anybody has got enough to grind an' keep him goin' till crops come in he's lucky. None to part with. Haven't got enough myself. Maybe Mary —" he began with embarrassment.

"Hers is gone. I asked her."

"You don't say?" in dismay. "That's bad; mighty bad," he repeated after awhile.

"You say there's none to sell," Jenifer insisted.

"Not a nubbin in the Hollow. Thar might be some at the Park."

"The Park?" Jenifer had not heard the name mentioned before.

"Down thar at the mouth o' the Hollow. Didn't you see it when you come in?"

"It was dark," answered Jenifer briefly.

"Lots o' trees," the old man continued, "an' an orchard between it and the trail; an' the house sort o' set back."

Jenifer remembered. "I know. I saw it. I had forgotten."

"Well, they may have some thar."

"I shall go down in the morning."

"Ain't nobody to tend to nothin' thar but the ol' lady, less the young one has taken holt. She's spry enough for anything," he chuckled. "Man named Morgan was workin' the place, an' he up an' quit, right after he had put in the crops; put off for some mills or other. Jus' lef'! An' I don't know what they're goin' to do. Ain't got nobody yet, far as I know."

Wooten watched Jenifer shrewdly, but if his gossip embodied any hint the younger man had not taken it.

Jenifer had forgotten what he heard when he tramped the rough way next morning. Lightfoot was left whinnying behind the willows. The walk suited Jenifer better. It was as strange to him as if he never put foot on the trail. Darkness had hidden it, and he had not cared

a whit concerning it when he had climbed it in the night, but now, as the way unwound, glimpse by glimpse, he saw the high-lying, hill-broken valleys, and, clouding into the sky, the peaks beyond, the lower mountains he had left.

The narrow gorge Jenifer trod was like an inlet that has beaten its way into rough lands, and spread into a fair bay at their feet. The bay was Briar Park.

Young apple-trees bent above him as Jenifer turned aside. Wide and clear came down the stream that sang by his own house. It was slumberous in the morning, and the shadows fell heavily upon the wide porch and through the empty hall. Jenifer knocked, and had no answer; again, to hear nothing.

The hall was wide, but not long; and a door opened at the opposite end. Jenifer crossed to it lightly, as if half afraid. He saw to the right a sleeping apartment; and to the left a dismantled and darkened room. The door which he gained opened on an angle between the main house and the wing; and the steps led to a rioting garden. Jenifer, on the topmost stair, gazed with sudden, intent interest.

Whoever planted it long years before must have had in memory some loved garden left across the seas and striven to ease a heartache for broad downs and blue seas. Roses climbed the house walls and running myrtle crowded to the mossy bricks. The long leaves of violets grew thick about the steps. Beyond the formal path syringa bloomed, and the "shrub" was brown with blossoms, and the jessamine starred its light leaves with milk-white clusters. The fragrant



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yellow trumpet of its fellow swung by its side. Beyond, thick and untrimmed box hedges led beneath bending fruit-trees. Farther yet was what Jenifer thought to be a vegetable garden. A tangle of althea and lilac and wild plum-bush was back of all.

The sight of it was like a clutch at his fought for peace, his imposed forgetfulness. He remembered the old garden he had loved. He did not see a figure that flitted around the corner, keeping close to the ivied and rose-covered wall; and the light flying step on moss and myrtle was unheard.

"Miss Amblah! Miss Amblah!" called a high thin voice.

"Gawd! What's she done now?"

"Miss Amblah!"

Stooping low, the girl sped from bush to bush, keeping hidden. A stifled laugh, a cry of astonishment, and Jenifer looked down on a young woman holding apart the syringa boughs which met above her head.

Her hair was black, and loose about her face; her eyes were opened wide and, at that moment, they were dark as Jenifer's; her cheek curved to a dimple in her chin. Her red lips parted like a startled child's; and the flowers framed her, as they should.

Jenifer, silent, his eyes and mouth stern in his astonishment, gazed down at her.

"Miss Amblah!"

His breath came quick. It was the little maid.



## XVIII

THE girl dropped the branches behind her and stepped nearer. "Do you wish to see my aunt?" she asked, with sudden touch of haughtiness.

Jenifer was dumb. For him the spell had not yet broken.

"Are you looking for my aunt?" the girl demanded, a flash of quick anger in her eyes.

"I — I suppose so," Jenifer stammered.

"She will be here directly. You had best wait in the hall."

A rose thorn had caught at the hem of her white gown, and held her. She pulled at it impatiently.

"Wait," said Jenifer, coming slowly down the steps. "Let me unfasten it."

"It's no matter," she cried, twisting her head impatiently to see where she had been caught.

Jenifer kneeled to unfasten it, and she turned a flushed face, where vexation half-hid her merriment, to look at him. The red rose, whose briar had clutched her gown, drifted its blossoms between his face and hers.

"Miss Amblah," the high voice called, and nearer. Jenifer stumbled to his feet.

He never knew how he followed her into the big

room which was sleeping-room and parlor alike; nor how, grown suddenly hospitable, the girl made him at home, looked to his comfort, and flitted off.

He sat dazed. The child had been a fairy vision of his boyhood. She had been forgotten; and dimly recalled but to be broidered with fancies and again put aside. Jenifer had never thought of seeing her again, and she was found. Her swift light step was in the hall.

"Aunt Molly will be here in a moment;" she flashed the stranger a shy smile. "Here she is now." Ambler shrank back by the farther window. A deep and wide mahogany bureau bulged between them.

"I am sorry I was so hard to find. I hope I have not kept you waiting," Aunt Molly panted, her breath short from her haste; and she held out her soft, well-padded hand to the tall and earnest-eyed young man who rose to meet her. Whoever was in Aunt Molly's house was instantly a guest, and it needed no second glance to assure her that this man was a gentleman. She waved him to his chair, and sat down not far away. "Getting mighty warm," she ventured, as a friendly beginning.

"I — I came over to see if I could buy some corn," blurted Jenifer, never wholly at ease with women and now doubly awkward.

"To buy corn!" Aunt Molly's blue eyes were wide.

"I heard you might have some to sell," Jenifer blundered.

"I am sure I don't know," coldly. "You will have to ask Joshua."

"Aunt Molly" — Ambler stepped out into the room — "we have plenty, I know."

"Well, I'm sure I don't," plaintively. "Ever since that wretched man went off —"

"We are better without him," declared the girl sturdily.

"Then I don't see it. But Joshua —"

"We have plenty," said Ambler, looking across at Jenifer, "and will be glad to sell."

"Leave it to Joshua."

Ambler laughed. "He can't do everything, Aunt Molly."

"You'll find him in the yard, Mr. — Mr. —"

"Wooten," Jenifer interjected.

"If you will walk out in the yard, Mr. Wooten, you will find the man there."

Ambler dimpled suddenly. She remembered her dispute with the old negro and her flight.

"Amber, will you go with him?"

Jenifer started at the contraction of the name, it so exactly fitted her quaintness. He knew what he had first thought of when he saw her, — a dim and narrow street, a jutting window, and in the duskiess of it old jewels flashing, with polished beads in the midst of them glowing like molten sunshine. He thought of them when he walked by her side, when they found the suspicious-eyed negro, when Joshua turned the key in the corn-house door, while they bargained, — Ambler listening gravely, — and when they returned slowly houseward.

"You found some?" asked Aunt Molly.

"Of course," assented Ambler easily.

"I am much indebted to you," began Jenifer formally.

"I am sure that if you could find some one to look after this farm we would be more indebted to you." Aunt Molly believed in an open display of her vexations. Some one who understood them might sometime lend a hand. "Do you know of any one?"

A sudden flash of purpose leaped in Jenifer's eyes, but Aunt Molly was looking away from him. "Where are you staying?" she continued placidly.

"Up in the mountain."

"Oh," with sudden change of tone. The dwellers of the high valleys and rolling hills have only contempt for those of the mountain pockets; and they of the hollows, only hatred for the people of the valleys. War, centuries old, is between them. "I thought you were a stranger," Aunt Molly added coldly.

"I am."

"Oh!" with less disdain and more interest. "You don't know of anybody?" turning in her chair the better to look at the young man standing in the middle of the floor, his soft hat crumpled in his hand.

"Yes," said Jenifer calmly, "I think I do."

Aunt Molly leaned forward in delighted surprise. "Who?"

"Myself."

"You!" She leaned back and critically surveyed his height, his ease of carriage, his firm mouth, and the gleam of amusement in his eyes. She remembered her instant classification of him. It was not necessary

that Morgan's successor should be a gentleman. "Are you a farmer?" she faltered.

"Yes," he said with an odd smile about his mouth. Ambler's searching gaze was on him, and he feared that more than her aunt's.

"You think you could undertake it?"

"Yes."

"At once?"

Jenifer assented. Aunt Molly leaned back and pondered. Suddenly the look of perplexity fled from her face. "Providence has sent you," she vowed fervently. "I wouldn't dare to say a word. You will come to-morrow?"

Jenifer agreed.

"And start right in? The Lord certainly brought you here this day," she declared with the easy confidence of those who shoulder their own lax carelessness upon an ever interfering Providence. "Amber, you and Joshua and Mr.—Mr. Wooten—odd name; some people up in the mountain have it. Any kin?" she asked keenly.

"I did not know of them before I came," answered Jenifer, a smile twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"Well, you can talk it over. Whatever you decide will be all right. Amber knows more about it than I do," which was the truth. The Park was Ambler's, inherited from her father, Miss Molly's brother; but the aunt's guardianship had lasted so long and the girl's reliance had been so absolute that, even with the assertiveness of Ambler's new ideas, the rule of affairs was as much in Aunt Molly's hands as in those

of her niece. Now, Miss Molly settled back comfortably. The walk in the yard had been exertion enough. The air was cool and fresh in the big room, and the book she had read many times still held her interest.

Ambler in her young eagerness questioned Jenifer closely; but her eyes said more than her lips. His mental grasp of the work of the place was quick, would he do more than follow the old routine? Had he any ideas upon the subject beyond those which moved his muscles? He was capable of good hard labor the young woman after one measuring look had decided, but of what else?

Ambler's theories had upset Morgan from his long tenure. Morgan could raise wheat and corn and hogs, and have plenty one year and scarcity the next, according — as Aunt Molly also would have put it — to the ways of Providence. Ambler wished to assist that high power in its provisioning and so they had disagreed. Morgan was "tiahed o' farmin' anyhow. Done tromp after the plow long enough in my day. An' de chilluns is big enough to go in de mill what's done sot up nigh town. Me an' the ol' woman goin' take it easy fer a spell." So he had gone, like others, to the call of the whistle in the valley.

Ambler was glad, though she dare not say it. She felt a secret uplift towards the inspiration that Providence might fulfil her desires as well as the wishes of others. She was distinctly pleased with the guise that help at present took, but she was also puzzled.

It is seldom that any life, at any time, touches another without leaving some trail of memory across it. With

Ambler it was but a bewilderment which showed in the furrow between her black brows and in the quick flash of her eyes; and both vanished while Jenifer watched and divined their cause. He would not help her solve the difficulty. He resolved to be unknown, and trusted to distance and remoteness to keep him so, though he feared he had put his determination in jeopardy by his sudden impulse.

Joshua hovered near. "Miss Amblah done had dem apple-trees sot out," he announced when they were in the yard. "An' she 'low like dey'll bring de gol' itse'f."

"They will," asserted Ambler calmly. "Pippins," she exclaimed succinctly, with a wave of her hands towards the new orchard. "You noticed them?"

Jenifer pretended that he had taken close observation.

"An' she done had dem set out on de mountain; an' peach-trees. An' de lan's fittin' fer nothin' but rocks and briars, same like what give de name to de place."

"You will see what it is fit for," declared Ambler. "You just wait a year or two till the trees begin to bear." The girl was used to arguing with Joshua, teasing him and flouting him, and the old negro adored her.

"That's about all." Their talk of the trees had come at the end of her explanations. "The place is small, barely a hundred acres"—it had been a thousand—"and there's no getting much out of it unless—" But Ambler ended with a sigh. No one believed in the possibilities of her plans, not even Joshua. It was



too soon to speak of them to Jenifer, but she went with him across the yard and wanted to know what he thought of the growing trees. The straight set trunks, the grass-free land were as she had made Morgan have them; and she delighted in the slim, laden branches. "We can ship this year," she told Jenifer jubilantly, looking at them across the brown clear stream.

A log bridged the brook, and a great walnut-tree shadowed the crossing. Ambler sat down on a root and lifted her hat from her dark head, sighing impatiently as she pushed up her dampened hair. Sometimes she laughed at the futility of her efforts, and sometimes she was tired of it. Now she was tired. Her fancy had leaped too strongly towards the newcomer, and reaction had already begun.

Jenifer stood near; there were one or two more questions and the young man was in no hurry.

Foxglove peered into the brown water, and mint and ferns and mosses. Mosses, too, were about the tree. Jenifer remembered how he had sought them in the deep wood. So the baby hair had curled about her forehead, so the child's lips drooped wistfully, so — She looked up suddenly, and caught his glance. The red ran up her cheek and a furrow down her forehead. She began questioning him, as a stranger might, and he answered guardedly.

Ambler's ear was quick. She knew the mountain drawl, the burr of her countrymen, the nasal tone of the Northern newcomer, and the accent of the Englishman. Jenifer's voice was full and round, and of that quality to which she was most accustomed. Un-

consciously Ambler trusted it. Still he had given no clue to knowledge of the country.

"It's warm to-day," said Jenifer inanely, when she fell back to puzzled silence, "and tiresome, walking about," with a glance at the clinging tendrils of her hair.

"I don't know. I seldom get tired. The air is pure and invigorating so high up," she said absently.

"Pretty cold in winter," he ventured stupidly.

Ambler flashed a quick look up at him. "Cold!" Instantly she was the merry-faced girl he had come upon in the garden. "It's beautiful! You should see it. All the mountains dazzling, the valleys white, the peaks there shining," — the sweep of her brown hand traced against the sky the range of the hills Jenifer had left, "and the air like — like — It shames it to compare it with anything. And sometimes," with awed voice and wide eyes and an intent leaning forward, "when the air is still and — I don't know what makes it, nor why it comes, nor when it will be heard; but sometimes, when it's still and clear, the Voice sounds over the mountains. Have you ever heard it?"

"No," Jenifer was forced to admit.

"You will. You will," she reiterated as she sprang to her feet. "And when you do tell me what it says, what it is singing about. I never know. I have listened and listened, but —" she shook her head.

"I shall listen and tell you." Jenifer spoke quickly. His tone was warm, his eyes friendly, warmer and friendlier than he knew, and out of keeping with their acquaintanceship and its basis. Ambler was instantly

on the defensive, though her own impulsiveness had caused it.

"Well, Mr. Wooten, we will look for you in the morning," she called over her shoulder, as she turned towards the house.

Jenifer crossed the log bridge, but stood amongst the apple-trees to watch her, his fingers twisting a switch he had broken. Very small she was and light of motion, walking up beneath the oaks. She half-turned, he slipped further back, and when he looked again there was but the flicker of her white dress through the door.

Jenifer's thoughts, as he tramped up the trail, were at first only of her, of the wonder of finding her, and his instant resolve to help her. He had seen the trace of poverty, the rotting fences, the sagging gates, the half-tilled land; and he had seen the girl's perplexity and guessed how she had been hampered. His impulse to aid her had been quick and strong, and with it was mingled some romantic idea of repaying her for the brightest joy his boyhood had known.

But as the way grew steep he began to remember the preacher, and to laugh to himself as he wondered what the old man would say. Perhaps they would meet somewhere along the way, and Jenifer's gaze searched the narrow climbing paths for Wooten, but he could see little of them, only where they wound here and there. He hurried on.

"Ye-o — ho-e — ho!" A cry rang up the Hollow.

Jenifer turned. He could see no one, but he sent the mountain call ringing up the gorge, and waited.

It was repeated and a call: "Hol' on!" Jenifer sat down on a moss-grown stone, waiting till the steps crashing down the path should bring the old man to his side.

"Well?" Wooten questioned as soon as he reached Jenifer. Jenifer looked up with quizzical glance.

"Fin' some corn?"

"Yes."

"Hm!" The old man stood straight, his hands on his hips, and peered down into Jenifer's face. "Some-thin' else, too; what's it?"

Jenifer's only answer was his teasing laugh.

"You — you're goin' to take Morgan's place?" quickly and decisively.

"Yes." Jenifer got to his feet. "Yes," he repeated soberly, "I've found some work to do."

"Seems to me like you had a plenty befo'. What's the use of everlastin' lookin' about for something to do?" Wooten asked fretfully, though the thought had first been his own.

"The good Lord gives us plenty o' time to look 'round an' see what He done made for us; but lan' I we're so 'tarnal busy tryin' to rival Him in workin' ourselves, we get no chance to see it."

Jenifer's smile showed his understanding of the old man's plaint. With his laziness Wooten was yet thrifty. He was everything in spells. He was "hefty," — according to mountain phrase, — and fiery; and without thinking of it, he ruled the Hollow.

He was silent as he tramped by Jenifer's side, and when the young man turned off the trail Wooten was still with him.

They sprang from stone to stone, crossing the smaller stream, and stood in the little clearing. The indian pinks flamed at their feet.

"See the young one, that young woman thar?" Wooten demanded suddenly.

Jenifer nodded. His eyes were gleaming with amusement.

"Gosh! but she's a sight," vowed the mountaineer. "An' as sassy as a mockin'-bird ever since the day she was born. I know her. I've kept my eye on her. An' nothin' 'minds me o' her but these," stooping his height to the crimson flowers and plucking a handful. "Yes, sir," looking at the pinks in his big fist, "when I see 'em, I think o' her; an' when I see her, I think o' them," admitted this old lover of women.

## XIX

WHEN the sun swung above the far mountains and stole across the high valleys and into the hollows of the misty peaks towering behind The Park, Ambler stood on the porch.

She had recalled a hundred hints and directions that she must give to Jenifer, and the thought of them had kept her restless at night and wakened her with dawn. She feared Jenifer's industry would bring him down the Hollow before she was ready to see him, but the young man showed evidence of no such haste. Ambler ate her own light breakfast, came out to the bridge which he must pass. Still there was nothing but murmuring stream and golden sunlight, sifting through the walnut leaves; and across the wet grass the long shadows of the oaks.

After awhile the girl forgot that she was waiting, for the water sang softly on its way, the whisper of the leaves was low, and the air fresh upon her face. She sat down on the end of the old log bridge and leaned with drooping head and dreamy face to watch the sunlit, rippling shallows and brown clear pools.

Jenifer, skirting the orchard on Lightfoot, reined the horse, and waited for a breathless moment watching her; then Lightfoot splashed through the stream. Ambler was in a second afoot.

She stood with wide, delighted eyes and flushed cheek, as Jenifer rode up to her; but Jenifer knew that every glance was for the horse. The rider was unnoticed.

"Oh!" she said softly, as Jenifer sprang from Lightfoot's back. "What a beauty!" It was characteristic of Ambler to forget in her admiration of the horse the reason for her waiting; and her eyes followed every line of slender curving flank and tapering legs and graceful head. "You darling," she breathed ecstatically. "What's her name?"

Jenifer, by the horse's head, his hat hiding his amused eyes, told her.

"I must," she cried, coming close enough to touch her. "She isn't unfriendly?" and she put her hand on Lightfoot's muzzle, watching the pricked forward ears and tense muscles, as the horse stood ready to shy if the touch were not to her liking. "There's no such horse on this place," she exclaimed, half resentful that it should be true.

For a second Jenifer accused himself of foolhardiness in riding Lightfoot to The Park. But the trail was long, and plowing was to be the labor of the day; and he was unused to such continuous work. Nor had he thought that his horse might attract attention from either the women of the house or the old negro. Not knowing what to say to Ambler's rapturous appreciation, he stood with startled pleasure listening to it.

"Does she hunt?" the girl asked suddenly.

"I have never tried her."

"Can she jump? She looks it."



"Certainly."

Ambler whirled about, her gaze searching the yard. A brooklet trickled at the far side of the lawn to join the stream. It was the only boundary between yard and field and it had worn a deep and wide bed for its tortuous way. "Try her at that," the girl instantly commanded.

In a second Jenifer had swung himself into the saddle. Lightfoot skimmed across the yard, leaped clean and clear, and circled in the field.

Her rider pulled her up at Ambler's side. "Has a woman ever ridden her?" asked the girl wistfully.

"No." Jenifer was delighted with the unexpected moment.

"I wonder —" Ambler left her sentence unfinished and eyed the horse critically. "I don't believe she would mind."

"Should you like to try?" asked Jenifer quickly. "Have you a saddle?"

"Of course; but this will do." A handful of flat leather was on Lightfoot's back. "If I could ride her at all, I could ride her on that." Before Jenifer could come around where the girl stood, Ambler's hands were on the saddle, she had sprung up to it, gathered the loose reins in her firm hands, and, her slim body bent forward, was urging the horse to a run.

Lightfoot, sidling from the flapping of skirts upon her flanks, cavorted across the yard. "Take care!" Jenifer shouted, racing to overtake them.

For answer Ambler brought the horse in a lope curving around him, settled Lightfoot's paces to a run,

and sped for the leap. It was straight and glorious, but the horse was fretted, her blood afire; and she ran wild. Before Ambler could regain control of her the horse swept under a low tree, — and Ambler lay in the grass beneath it.

“God!” Jenifer panted, as he ran. He feared to reach her, feared what he would find. She lay still, her arm crumpled under her head, one hand outflung, as she had fallen. His voice choked as he tried to speak, his hand shook as he slid it beneath her shoulder, but at his touch the girl’s eyes flew open. She lay for a moment looking dreamily up at him, and then beyond; and she saw the circling horse.

Ambler sprang to her feet. “She threw me,” she gasped. “She threw me.”

“You are hurt.”

“No. No; had the breath knocked out of me. I am not hurt,” she said, impatient at Jenifer’s anxiety, as she leaned weakly against the tree. “But that horse, bring her here. Catch her, I say,” and, at Jenifer’s dumb surprise, she reiterated “Bring her here.”

Jenifer, doubtful what that flashing anger in the girl’s eyes presaged, came back to her with Lightfoot tugging at the rein he held.

“You bad thing! You wicked horse!” Ambler scolded, like an angry child. “What made you do it?” Then in a second her arms were about Lightfoot’s neck, her cheek against the horse’s head, and Lightfoot stood still and quiet. Ambler looked up at Jenifer, and laughed at the fright, perplexity, and astonishment written on his face.

The girl's hand stole to the bridle loop; and, as Jenifer still watched her with apprehension, like a flash she was on Lightfoot's back, and both were gone.

Jenifer, racing to the stable in search of a horse with which to make hopeless pursuit, ran into Joshua.

"What's de mattah now?" the old man exclaimed.

Jenifer gasped his errand.

"Go 'long," Joshua called after him. "Don't you worry yo'se'f. Ain't nothin' gwine huht Miss Amblah. De onlies' hoss up from de pastu'," he added when he caught up with Jenifer, "wouldn't cotch up wid Miss Amblah ef she was afoot. Don't you min' her tricks. You go 'long 'bout yo' work."

Jenifer could take no such cold-blooded advice and he was half-mad with anxiety when Ambler came riding Lightfoot serenely to the stable gate.

"I had to take it out of her," the girl excused her deed, "and there is a good piece of ground down the road, and — and — She had thrown me, you see, and was afraid of me; and we could never have been friends. Now —" she leaned to stroke the horse caressingly.

Joshua was back in the stable yard, but lifted never a scornful eyelid.

"I am glad," said Jenifer simply. "The horse will be here in the stable every day. I hope you will ride her often. It will be good —"

"For both." Ambler's laugh bubbled out merrily. "I shall attend to her to-day. Don't wait," seeing the plow, and knowing what had kept Jenifer.

"Humph!" snorted Joshua, bending above his pitchfork.

Ambler stood radiant but doubtful. The old negro's disdain was making itself felt, like a breath of raw wind on the warm air or a shadow across the sunny space.

"She shall have all she wants to eat and the best stall in the stable," the girl was assuring herself gaily, as Lightfoot followed her to the door, and this time Ambler was too near for Joshua to grunt an expression of his anger. The stiffness of his lean body, and the tension of his wrinkled face must show his feelings as she passed, but he could not long restrain himself.

"Miss Amblah," he called fretfully. "Miss Amblah! Gawd's sake, ain't you done fussin' 'bout dat hoss yit. Dar ain't a aig in de house," he complained.

"Have you looked for them? Couldn't you find any this morning?"

"What time I got fer sech things?" Joshua knew where three lay in the manger and where six were hidden in the loft, and he knew too how Ambler delighted to find them; he had left them untouched.

"Dyar's yo' basket," he said grumpily. "I done brought it down fer you. Ef I'd 'a' known you was cuttin' up so scan'lous —"

"Oh, pshaw, Joshua, hush! I just did it for fun. And she goes like the wind." The girl shut her eyes tight for a second of ecstatic remembrance.

Joshua rolled his eyes to look at her, and was silent.

"Where's the basket?" Ambler picked it up, and went searching from stall to stall. Her cry and count told when each egg was found; and her eyes were keener than Joshua's.

"A dozen," she called joyously, before she ran up the steep stair to the loft. "A dozen and a half," she cried when she came down. "Six for the house, and twelve to sell. How much are they bringing now?"

"Ten cents de las' time I was at de sto'."

"Well, they won't get them!" she exclaimed in hot indignation. "No, sir; not a one. I will — I will put them in a cake first. I will make one to-day, right now, while it is cool. Joshua, come and make me a fire in the kitchen," she begged in growing enthusiasm.

"Who? me?" Joshua's eyes were wide in pretence of intense surprise.

"Yes, you; come on," Ambler coaxed.

"Law's-a-mussy! What is you thinkin' of? An' I got de rheumatiz fit to kill; an' ebery time I ben's my back I git a crick in it."

"I'll give you a piece of cake first thing." The bait had no effect. "A big piece." Joshua had not yet straightened up. "I'll bake you one in a saucer, all for yourself." The darkey slowly unbended. "There's nothing in this world as good for rheumatism and — and 'cricks' as cake. You know it." Ambler clinched the bargain with dancing eyes.

"Go 'long, Miss Amblah, go 'long. I'll hab dat stove a-roarin' befo' you beats de aigs."

Joshua had not looked for one result of the cake-making. Ambler insisted that a generous share should be sent to Jenifer when he "took out" at noon. She had ridden his horse; he should share her treat: and she bade Joshua carry it, which he did — as far as the barn, where he found a cool place in the carriage-

shed, sat down, put his back comfortably against the boards, and ate the sweet stuff to the last rich crumb.

Ambler wondered for a day or two why Jenifer had not thanked her, and then she forgot it. She was finding out that Jenifer's ideas coincided with her own. He was a theorist too and he added to theory practical knowledge and clear common sense, of which qualities she lacked at least one.

Jenifer was in charge, but there were instructions and warnings which Ambler must constantly give. "I forgot to tell you, we arrange with Mr. Mason for his threshing machine in harvest. He will be here by the middle of July."

Or she would ask about visionary crops. Was it too late to plant harvest peas in the corn-rows? Was the grass in the meadow not thick enough to cut for hay? And there were many projects of the young woman who seemed, unfortunately, to gather to her slim self the energy of generations.

Jenifer had given to his own loved acres not half the interest he gave to these. Those had been to him an enthusiasm and had served as testing-ground for his observations in other lands. These he worked upon with no capital but his brains and no labor but that of his own hands, and he pitted himself against the earth to conquer it.

At first he was unequal to the task, but day by day his muscles hardened and his strength grew; and he could have never failed beneath the eyes that watched him. He thought that he worked in grim determination, because idleness and memory were intolerable,

and because of the hidden remembrance of long ago, childish friendliness. So he did — at first.

Jenifer's dawning ideal of what life should be had been born from the spirit of mouldy pages. The instructions of his boyhood had impressed upon him two laudable purposes, — to gain an education and to make a living. He had learned the early lesson, crowned it with success, and had begun to see, in those winter days at the Old Place, that he had failed in his blind content and in his withholding from his fellows.

Now to find that he had shrined an ideal in the innermost of his strong nature by seeing one who might have fitted to it, and by hearing a woman's laugh which might have been its music! Now, when the way was shut! To see how clearly matched their thoughts! To frame amusedly to himself their differences, — his silences, her gay speech; his unchangeableness of purpose, her wilfulness! And beyond and beneath was a world of dreams and fancies and thought for which the man had as yet no name.

There was nothing to forbid Jenifer's friendliness with Ambler. Miss Molly, with her placid indolence, looked no further than her door, her few wants, a neighbor's visits, and her church; and Joshua, with his thunders of growlings and his lightnings of sarcastic speech, made no interference.

Truth, the old negro had "lef" Miss Amblah to herse'f." There had been a joyous day when he had declared that "Miss Amblah gwine do sumpin fer de fam'ly sho," that something meaning a fortunate marriage; and he had counted upon his stubby fingers



those whom he thought worthy the gate of Briar Park. He had watched the slip of a girl round to childish womanhood; and he had seen all those he named find their way to the mountain's foot — and back again. Ambler had laughed at their love-making, and that no man will endure: flauntings and scornings he may brave, even beratings, but when the woman laughs, the man is gone.

Joshua had striven to teach her wisdom in vain, and, having failed, he “done give her up.”

Still, even if he had thought of it, the old negro could have found no fault with Ambler's intercourse with Jenifer. She crossed the young man's way not half so often as she had Morgan's; and when she met Jenifer and stopped for speech with him, Joshua could have heard nothing beyond the business of the place.

Jenifer, however, did not know how keenly he had grown to watch for her; how black was the door when no gleam of her dress lightened it; how empty the yard when, with Lightfoot at his shoulder, he crossed it in the evening, and she was nowhere near; nor how desolate the trail up the gorge when he had caught no glimpse of her.

There, perhaps, Wooten would be waiting by the way. Jenifer would slip from his saddle, and the sturdy old man would trudge by his side. Sometimes there would not be a word between them. The stars came out above the peaks, and the night wind stole with sighs and whispers through the hollow; and the brawling of the brook was louder as they climbed.

Often Wooten had a tale of sickness to tell, fever

in the cabin on the highest peak, an unknown ailment in the hut the path wound from the trail to reach. They were to Wooten as his own. Jenifer listened thoughtfully.

"Who's taking care of the family?" he might ask, putting his finger on a vital point.

"Hm!" would be the old man's only answer.

"Have they got any meal?"

"'Bout a pint."

"Flour?"

"'Bout a sifter full."

"Coffee?"

"Ain't heard the grinder in that house for a week."

"Take Lightfoot to-morrow and go down to the store. Yes; I can walk. You know what they need." Jenifer's scant store of money could still spare enough for the bill the old man was thankful to feel in his hard palm.

Often Wooten followed Jenifer to his cabin. It was spotless, and the cool cleanliness soothed the old man's wistful homesickness; and Jenifer, with his calm good-nature, his quick friendliness, and the bond of sturdy primitiveness between them, eased his loneliness.

When the stars filled the space of heaven stretched above the peaks, when the fireflies twinkled in the thick grass, and the tobacco was red in the men's pipes, Wooten was fairly content. He had not preached for months, the wild mood not moving him. Something in Jenifer's calmness and strength, and the odd, but close, intimacy between them held the preacher's strain of vehemence in abeyance. Something too, in the singing of the brook and the sound of the wind of the

summer's night upon the mountain. "Son," said Wooten slowly, "this is mighty good."

And Jenifer, at full length in the dry grass, his pipe smoked out, his hands beneath his head, his gaze on the moon that climbed the peak, to fill the Hollow with shifting silvery lights, echoed him. It was "mighty good."

## XX

"Oh, dear!" cried Ambler impatiently, "I can do nothing with it. First it catches my dress and then my hair. I might as well try to fasten myself against the wall as this; it would be easier. Joshua, catch it. There it comes; look out!"

Joshua ducked the long branch which had escaped her, and stood looking up at "Miss Amblah" swaying on an uncertain ladder that was propped against the wall of "the wing." A storm had beaten down the rose-vine. Verbena and phlox bent heavy heads. The paths were ruddy from the rain; and a wren was singing in the pear-tree.

"'Clare, Miss Amblah," the old darkey grumbled, "I don't see what you want to bother 'bout the ol' thing fer nohow; 'tain't wuth it."

"Yes, it is. Hold it up, higher; towards me. Dear me," she fretted, "if it grew anywhere else but by the dining-room window I'd leave it alone. It could stay where it is. But if I did" — she was leaning from the shaky ladder. One hand clutched an upper rung, and the other reached for the thorny arm — "if I did, I'd never have another rose to peep in the window while I ate my breakfast. I couldn't miss that. Patience, it's gone again!"

"Laws-a-mussy! why didn't you leave the old thing alone?" A thorn had caught in Joshua's whitened wool; when he reached up to disentangle it another scratched his wrinkled cheek. He had been mad before, now he blazed. "What you look lak anyhow, perched up dyar same lak a sparrer? Laugh, laugh; you'd laugh if you was a-dyin'. La, Miss Amblah," in sudden contrition, "come 'long down! You's too big to be triflin' wid sech things."

"If I were just a little bigger, it would have been done long ago," vowed the girl saucily, her eyes wet from laughter.

"Perhaps I can fix it for you." Jenifer's tone was grave, his eyes shining. Neither Ambler nor the old negro had heard him coming around the angle of the house.

"If you would!" Ambler came gingerly down the few steps she had mounted. "If you only would! Oh!" The rickety ladder slid beneath her shifting weight, and flung her backwards. She swayed for a second against Jenifer's shoulder, and then, red as the rose behind her, stood a yard away.

"If I were only as tall as you it would have been done," she cried in brave defence of her confusion. "Look!" The gesture of her outspread hands was mock tragedy. It was in comic despair of trailing vine and beaten bush. "The ivy is long enough to train back again. The roses I shall leave alone, all but this. A — h!" long-drawn, and spoken with delight. Jenifer slipped the ladder into place, poised himself lightly upon it, and leaned to fasten the long and thorny

branch by rusted nail and broken thread. "Thank you," she said sedately, as Jenifer sprang to the ground.

"I promised Joshua some help about the garden," began the young man stiffly. "I had to take out before the storm; and it is too late to go back again, and so —"

"It's too late to do anything else," declared Ambler lightly. "See!" The emphatic nod of her head was towards the west. The sky above the peaks was stained with red and the wet walks shone in ruddy light. Swallows were abroad, and the black bats beat their wings in the cool air.

Jenifer smiled at the girl's air of bright assurance. She stood in the walk between the border at the foot of the time-stained wall and the riot of vine and bush behind her, and looked about her with loving eyes. "Sometimes," she said slowly, "I think I must come out here and trim this wilderness. I've gone so far as to bring out the knife and shears; and then" — laughing softly at the admission — "I never knew what to cut. I couldn't spare a branch or blossom. All I could bear to touch were those quite dead, without the smallest breath of a bud about them. And so — and so —" She ended with a quick look at Jenifer and a laughing nod of understanding.

Jenifer's hands had sometimes ached to be among those things grown wild, pruning them, and bringing them to their best.

"Well," Ambler laughed and with a gesture put the subject aside. Then she said suddenly with an

emphasis of delight, "Mr. Wooten, those apples are ready to be picked."

Jenifer wondered what turn of thought or speech would come next. "I know," he said tentatively.

"I haven't an idea where to ship them. I don't know a thing about it." Her eyes belied the seriousness of her tone.

Jenifer laughed. Her acknowledgment of helplessness touched the absurd. "Would you leave it to me?"

"Would I!" with a quick clasping of her hands and an eager leaning forward.

The man laughed again. Her fervent tone, the way in which she caught at her breath, and the widening of her dark eyes were alluring.

"I am not going to risk leaving them on the trees another day. They are too nearly ripe. Another storm — No, they are uninjured yet. I have been out to see. But I'll not risk them longer. I've set my heart too much on success." Ambler had watched Morgan as he set the nurslings out and made him do it as she thought best, now she wanted to prove that she had been right.

The bloom on the trees had made the young orchard look that spring like a fleece flung at the mountain's foot. The thick-set fruit had been like jewels and their hue had grown to the shade of the sun when it flickers through green leaves.

"If you will leave them to me, I will see them picked and shipped, and look out for them."

Jenifer spoke slowly. His fingers had been none too



firm about the rose vine. The smell of the scattered petals, of late roses, and of spicy jessamine stifled him; — that, or the sight of her, straight, laughing, demure, or the tingle from the touch of her head for a flashing second upon his shoulder.

He felt it still. Her dark wilful hair had brushed but a moment against his cheek; the touch of her fingers had been light as a butterfly's wing; yet —

How alert she was! How earnest her eyes, with a flicker of fun ready to break through the gravity of her glance! The wind blew the curling hair about her forehead. The slender figure was proudly held. Her white gown clung close to it, — and the skirt was muddy at the hem. "It is too wet for you to stand there," said Jenifer abruptly.

"I never thought of it. I have been all over the orchard." She moved away towards the steps and sat down where the house had sheltered them and the wood was dry.

Jenifer followed and stood talking of some new project, Ambler, chin in palm, listening thoughtfully.

The man's tall figure was thin, compact, and muscular; his face brown and lean; and lines had cut themselves about his firm mouth. His eyes had lost their old content.

The sound of their voices was carried to Miss Molly in the porch. The fresh air that blew about her was such as she would have unloosed from the cave of the winds had the door of it been in her grasp. The sparkle on grass and leaves and rough wet trunks was like that of diamonds to her placid gaze. The rush of the full

stream was music. Miss Molly was more than content; she had begun to grow elated.

She knew from Ambler and Joshua that the wheat had been so well husbanded that it was better than its promise; that not a stalk of corn was strangled from neglect; and she had come to feel but one anxiety about the young man whose efforts brought such results: Would he stay on when his first term was past?

Miss Molly need not have worried. Late summer with its harvests, the autumn with its ingatherings slipped by; and there was no hint of Jenifer's going. The light was out of the Hollow and the stars above the peaks when he now climbed homewards and in the morning the rocks beneath Lightfoot's hoofs were white with frost. The horse stepped daintily down the slippery trail. The ivy by the path was red, the blackberry scarlet, and splashed with russet on its rough leaves, and, clear yellow and red-tinged brown and glaring crimson, chestnut and oak and dogwood, locust and hickory and gum, ran up to touch with fiery, saucy tips the sky.

The nights were black in the gorge, and too chill for Wooten to wait by the trail. He might be in Jenifer's cabin, a fire blazing ready for the master of it, and the old man comfortable before it; he might have passed on to his own hut after a day's tramping with gun upon his shoulder and keen eyes peering from tree to boulder. The squirrels or the partridges, hung by Jenifer's door, betokened the old man's success. Once a bronzed turkey drooped his wings beside the lean-to. That was the end of the week and Wooten happened

in for Sunday's dinner. The old man could have told before he saw it how the great bird would look and how the smell of the sage would float up to the sapling rafters. Mary must have cooked it; she had cooked them for him.

The yellow leaves of the slim willows in the thicket blew across the stream that day, and choked it with sodden golden barriers; and the logs of the cabin beyond and the rocks of its chimney were plain to the old man's sight when he gazed furtively through the little window. Once he saw a slow moving woman in the clearing, and once a sturdy boy. They were good friends, Wooten and the boy, when they met on path or trail, but the mother held aloof.

There came a night when Jenifer missed the preacher on the trail or by the fireside, and found no token of him at the cabin door. Another day brought still no sign of him. Jenifer was tired, — he had been plowing the land for winter wheat and the earth, wet after long rain, had clung to his boot-heel, and the plow cut deep and pulled heavily at his arms, — but he climbed to the old man's cabin to see why he had stayed away.

"Who's thar?" Wooten's voice demanded. "Who's thar? who's at that do'? Come in! Lan', son, is that you?" The old man hid his face in the quilts piled close about him. He did not want Jenifer to see how glad, how childishly glad, he was. "Well, I'm glad you're come," he grumbled, when Jenifer stood astonished by the bedside. "Took you long enough to fin' out. Lan' o' Goshen!" His face twisted into a wry knot.

Jenifer did not ask a question. One glance had showed him the littered room, the fireless hearth, the table where the old man had last eaten, and the candle on the stool beside the bed. Wooten, with agony in every movement, had lighted it for comfort. Jenifer knelt by the hearth, raked the ashes, piled the kindlings, and rolled the logs above them.

"Had anything to eat to-day?" he then asked.

"Don't want it."

Jenifer brushed the crumbs from the table, swept the rough floor, lighted the lamp, and piled the fire anew. His look searched the tidied room, the high bed where the covers sagged, and the old man helpless on his pillows. He turned on his heel; and Wooten heard him crashing down the mountain.

"Lan'," he moaned helplessly, "he's gone. Lawd-a-mussy!" His beard twitched, but the old man lay still. The sound of the crackling logs was friendly. He had heard nothing that day but the brawling stream, and the rising wind, as it shrieked through the gorge, and the trees as they bent before it; and, used as he was to the sounds, Wooten had never before heard them when he was not of them, active. To listen when he could not move a limb, to be shut off from them and hear their wailing, — "Lord!" he moaned, his mind on Jenifer and the loud and rapid step that soon was faint and lost, "Lord, what is he going to do? Has he gone clean away, an' lef' me? Is he comin' back? What was that?" Some night sound, the flitting of an owl past his door, the running of a squirrel upon his roof; but presently a rhythmic sound and a ringing

step. Jenifer stood in the door, and his hands were full.

The old man watched him with delight. Jenifer found a skillet. Something bubbled in it and sent out a steam to tickle appetite. Loaf-bread, white and even of grain and brown of crust, was on the table; and the battered coffee-pot shone on a corner of the hearth.

That night was the first. A week Jenifer was with the old man, night by night; the days were for the fields beyond the Hollow's mouth.

"Son," said Wooten placidly, on the seventh night, "you go 'long home now. Get a good night's sleep. You done stayed too long already. You can't burn a candle at both ends. If you work by day, you mus' sleep by night. But Sam" — he named his own child who sat by the fireside — "Sam's goin' to stay. He tol' me his ma sent him." Wooten's tone betrayed sheepish satisfaction.

Jenifer stretched his arms above his head. He had thrown himself into a low chair by the hearth, and his wet boots were thrust out towards the fire. "All right," he said dreamily.

"I believe you are half asleep."

"No."

Wooten turned his head on his arm. All his movements were easier. In a day or two he would be up and "huntin', yes, sir, huntin'! Think because I got wet one time when I was soppin' from climbin' an' climbin' an' peepin' at one sassy squirrel, an' never seein' the clouds behin' on the mountain till 'twas dark as night, an' the rain was a-comin', — think be-

cause I got took down once that I'm goin' to stay in the house. Shucks!" His impatience had cut short Jenifer's cautions.

"Son," asked the old man with a glance of mischief from beneath his shaggy brows, "how's that sassy thing down at The Park?"

Jenifer sat silent. Wooten, delighted, saw the length of the lounge stiffen. "She's thar yet?" the old man insisted.

"Who?" asked Jenifer coldly.

"That Miss Ambler. Lord,—what a name! Whar did she git it?"

"Her mother was a Miss Ambler," Jenifer's voice was like the air outside, icy.

"Sho!" said Wooten easily. Then after a second's pause. "Ever see her?"

"I have to."

Wooten chuckled. Jenifer, his lids lowered over his dark eyes, his gaze on the leaping fire, again saw the glimpse of her he had caught that day.

The ripened walnuts were thick in the grass and in the stream. The sound of their slow dropping that morning had been like steady firing of distant guns, and the yellow leaves had drifted down with them. In the afternoon Jenifer had seen Ambler husbanding the nuts, with Joshua for aid. A coat that showed her supple curves was buttoned across her breast, and on her black hair was a fluffy crimson cap. She had straightened to stroke Lightfoot's flank as Jenifer purposely led the horse near; and with sparkling eyes she had told of her ride that day.

"I was going down to the store, and — well, the road is like a plank, smooth and hard, and these frosty mornings" — with an ecstatic breath — "and Light-foot;" another sigh of satisfaction, as if words could express the charm of neither. "We heard a horn, way across country, a fox horn. You should have seen her toss her head and listen. She'd hunt splendidly."

"Try her sometime," Jenifer urged.

"I will," Ambler declared, in spite of Joshua's grumbling protest. Jenifer's last look back at her, through the leafless orchard, had shown her with the leaves drifting about her feet; and the last sound of her had been the ring of her laughter as she worked with the old negro, and teased and flouted him to rouse his scornful speech.

"Boun' to see her," Wooten ejaculated. "She's the boss, ain't she?"

"Yes."

"An' a good one I'll be boun'."

The shaft of mischief glanced clear of Jenifer, and the old man gave it up. "Well," he said after a long silence, while Jenifer's lowered lids gave his tired face a look of sleeping, and the boy sat, big-eyed and important, by the fire, his bare feet twisted upon the rungs of his hickory chair, "well, you might as well go 'long. You'll set thar all night like you did befo'; an' thar ain't no need to," the old man added softly, for him.

"Sure?" asked Jenifer, getting slowly to his feet, and stretching lazily against the spell of heat and dreaminess.



"Sure."

"All right." Jenifer reached for his hat; the door slammed, and he was gone.

"Name o' Goshen," faltered Wooten, "he's the suddenes' thing I ever saw; the slowes' and the suddenes'."

. . . . .  
That night Jenifer heard the Voice of the Mountain Spirit. The autumn had been foggy, the air heavy, the cold days few, and clear crispness rare. But the storm that caught Wooten on the mountain ended it. The air, as Jenifer strode homeward, was like strung steel to the reflex of sound. The stars were set above the peaks like diamonds held in a sapphire mesh which caught upon the mountain-tops; and through the Hollow the wind sang clear as a fiddler's note when one taut string is lightly struck, than another, and then, softly, the bow is drawn across them all.

Jenifer opened his door, but turned to look again into the night. Then he heard. Faint and far like the singing of many wires, low and mighty like the roll of distant surf, clear and sweet and high again, — a voice!

It was before him in the gorge, behind him and around him, amongst the mountain-tops, — and nowhere. He could give its sound no name, its presence no locality. First it thrilled with the fear that follows the footsteps of the unknown, and then its low voice seemed to sing of all unfulfilled promises, and forgotten hopes, and dreams that fade for want of stuff to feed upon.

Strong as Jenifer was, something stung beneath his lids. In the Hollow's dusk gleamed and faded the fancies he had not known to be so strongly cherished, early and material dreams, strange and unforgotten places striking some chord of beauty-love, swaying to some fancied fitness of things and so forever remembered, — mists in the valley, morning on the peaks, the Old Place in its glamour, a fair-haired woman and the imagery he had draped upon her; and the singing of the stream by his cabin, its stiller music at the Hollow's mouth, its clear shallows, and leaning above them a slender figure with eyes where laughter lurked behind a tender gravity.

The Voice rose to pæan. To him who listened all achievement was possible; all dream paths roads to realization; all longing of the soul a way towards the ordained. No path too steep, no day too long; they led to what the wild strain promised. They led — sorrow, defeat, strife, and agony — towards that goal prophesied by the mighty singing. Like a last sweep across the strings the Voice of the Spirit of the Mountains died away.

## XXI

"Miss AMBLAH," declared Joshua impressively, "things is a-comin' our way at las'."

Ambler, poised on the log bridge, peering to see what green things braved the cold beside the stream, or how the moss rounded its cushions amongst the rocks, stood erect and looked across at Joshua's jubilant face. She knew the negro's accustomed crookedness of speech, and that this was but a prelude.

"'Clare 'fo' goodness," begun the old negro slowly, as if his attention had been that moment riveted, "but dat pastu' is suttently a fine one." He spoke of the field where Lightfoot had flung her rider, and stood looking towards it, his long hands behind his back, his lean body swaying forward, and his thick lips pursed momentarily.

Ambler glanced carelessly over her shoulder.

"Watah a-runnin' dyar all de time, some o' de grass grows de wintah through, an' in summah time — er-hum! de flowahs an' de grass! Yit I 'members de time when you could scyarcely see de groun' fer de cows dyar. Now," with biting sarcasm, "dyar's jes one po' cow to de whole fiel'."

"Poor cow!" cried Ambler indignantly. "Dulcie is one of the finest cows in the country."

"Dat's so, dat's so," soothingly. "I nebbah is gwine back on Dulcie, an' her buttah fotchin' de highes' price at de sto' — leas'ways when you'll let me carry it dyar," with resentful flash, remembering how often it had been forbidden him. Ambler would stint herself and her small household of nothing for the sake of selling it. It was one of Joshua's grievances.

"But" — Joshua began to feel his way cautiously — "Dulcie she's none too young now, she ain't; an' we been sellin' her calf ebery year. Marse Howard," naming a neighbor slowly and reflectively, "he's got de pretties' little yaller calf you ebbah seed; an' he 'lowed he'll sell her for ten dollahs. Not as how I axed him," shaking his head virtuously. "I jes projected erroun' easisome lak, dat day I met him in de road, an' I say what is a Juzzey calf wuth, an' he up an' said he had one he'd sell fer ten dollahs." Joshua rubbed his bristly chin reflectively with the back of his hand and flashed Ambler a glance out of the tail of his expressionless eyes.

"A little yaller calf down dyar by de side o' Dulcie now, to be sho 'twould be a pritty sight to see her a-sportin' roun', an' kind o' growin' up wid de summah flowahs. Little calves is so lively an' sportsome, an' little yaller calves is suttently pritty. Dulcie now, she's raid."

The ripple of Ambler's laughter rang to the house. "And you would like to buy the Jersey?"

Joshua grinned, but was silent.

"All right!" Ambler ran lightly along the log, and with a spring was on the ground. "It's a good

idea. We ought to have another cow; and it's useless to feed poor stock," an axiom which she had caught from Jenifer.

"La!" chuckled Joshua, "an' in a year or two dyar'll be twice de 'mount o' buttah to sell — ef I gets a chance to sell it. Miss Amblah, Marse Jen'fah been tellin' me," began Joshua shamefacedly, "'bout chickens fotchin' a big price norf, early in de spring. An' he say as how he'll fin' out whar to sen' 'em."

"What in the world would you do with chickens this cold weather?" Ambler stopped to ask.

"I done thought o' dat. I'd keep 'em right dyar in de house wid me. Joshua won't min' de little things; no, indeedy. Dey'll be comp'ny dese long wintah nights. Aigs is bringin' a tol'ble price, an' dyar's some to sell; but ef I could try my han' at settin' 'em —"

"Take all you want." There was a trace of teasing in Ambler's tone. Joshua had withstood every hinted innovation and to talk to him about any new plan was, as the old negro had wrathfully assured her, "lak pourin' watah on a duck's back; don't huht him 'tall. He jes flop his wings an' flirt he'se'f an' go 'long." And Joshua had given a twist of his shoulders and a flap of his elbows in imitation. Ambler had understood. The rite of Jupiter Pluvius had been neglected. "Try it all you want," she called back over her shoulder.

"To be sho now," Joshua chuckled, "we mought make as much off de chickens as we do off Dulcie's calf. De-laws-a-me! ef dyar's one thing it takes to make money 'tis money;" and he went off, his lean breast swelling high with hopes.

How beneficent is a steady stream of money flowing through a life that has been bare for lack of it! What tender things, what blades of promise and buds of hope put up beside it! Miss Molly had done so long without things that she scarcely knew what to do *with*; and her placidity was but a last citadel. All else being charged and won by poverty the garrison of self had withdrawn to this, and held it bravely, with romance for aid and lack of ambition for accessory. But with the counting-in of winter and the hope of spring the uplift of thrift was in the air. Miss Molly felt the thrill of it.

Tender wheat grew where the embayed fields thrust between the foldings of the mountain foot; the fresh-ploughed land was red; the peak's side smoked with burning of its trees; Ambler and Joshua were forever out-of-doors; — but the better for Miss Molly's dreaming.

Her thumb was often between the worn pages, her gaze longer upon the fire, her placidity threaded with growing purpose; and, like many another quiet nature, she held to her plans tenaciously.

The beginning of her alluring ideas was about Ambler's clothes. Ambler had bought a dress at the country store, and had put it together neatly, but with a carelessness of effect. Miss Molly, aiding her, had had her imagination stirred by thinking, as she sewed before the winter's fire, of what her niece might wear and how she might look, and Miss Molly had the artist's perception of shades and colorings which is a gift.

Warm red tones she longed for, instead of the blue

stuff her fingers handled; and deep browns, with a hint of gold in their glintings, like the sheen of Ambler's hair and the sparkles in the iris of her eyes; or trailing whites for festive garb, puffed and rounded to show the dimpled arms and slender throat. To leave beauty unadorned is sin. Had it not been hard to see Ambler's slender girlhood throw out hints of promise with no means to foster them or give them proper setting? So, at least, it had seemed to Miss Molly.

The thoughts of the city's winters and The Springs' summers, which the child ought to have, had glowed upon the horizon and sunk beneath it, and Ambler had gone her wholesome, light-hearted way, none the worse for the fancied loss. To Miss Molly, missing these things was disaster. They were a heritage, they and the filling of the big rooms, now dismantled, with guests.

But was the misfortune irretrievable? Or, first, was Ambler always to go gowned in stuffs which, according to Miss Molly's dictum, showed such wretched taste? Had they not now the means of doing more? Did not Ambler's gleeful talk and Joshua's joyful reckoning mean that something better was at hand? Miss Molly's shrewd questioning soon elicited all she wanted to know: and then her dreams were deeper and brighter.

Home mathematics had been long simple. "No balance on hand" expressed them; and "decreasing capital" might have been added. Few women are successful lords of the soil, and Miss Molly's regency had depleted the place. Ambler's heritage was mainly



a tangle of tradition and perplexities, which she strove to break through, finding no weak spot in the hedgings. Now, the girl was wrapped in thoughts of progress and improvements.

"Mr. Wooten is going to run a new line of fence back of the woods," she announced one night. The two women had been silent before the fire. It was late, and Ambler had loosened her hair and shaken it free upon her shoulders. Miss Molly glanced lovingly at the curling ends and the glint of gold the firelight caught in its dark mass; and she asked a question to which she was unused.

"What will it cost?"

"Oh, I don't know. He can get the rails out of our own woods. Just a man to help him, I suppose. He is going to work on it himself. There's little to do just now."

"Humph!" said Miss Molly; but even dissent, with her, was good-natured.

"And the barn roof must be mended. I wish we could have it resingled."

Miss Molly was silent. She knew a better use for money, though it was yet too soon to speak of it.

"Aunt Molly," began Ambler slowly, — her cheek dimpling, her eyes glowing, — "maybe in the spring I can buy a horse. What do you think of that?" Ambler leaned over to clasp Miss Molly's round knee, and give it a loving squeeze.

"What in the world do you want with a horse? Isn't there one in the stable?"

"She does not belong to me," declared Ambler proudly.

"I am not talking of Mr. Wooten's horse," — Aunt Molly was clearly impatient, — "but Bill."

"Bill! He's an old plug. I would not be caught behind him; and as for riding!" — the tilt of her chin bespoke Ambler's distaste better than words.

"I am sure I am always glad enough to get him," declared Miss Molly plaintively.

"That's it; that's just it, Aunt Molly. Bill is needed for farm work. He is not fit for anything else. He's good in the fields, strong and steady; but he's a poke." The ripple of Ambler's low laugh set Miss Molly's lips a-smiling. "And — we — are — going — to have — a — horse — just to drive!" she added, with saucy emphasis. "You know that will be nice. You know you are longing to go all over the country and see everybody you know!"

"I should like to go about a little more —"

"I know, I know. I don't mind staying at home. I love it. But you —"

"I always liked company," announced Miss Molly gently, and sat happily silent, while the light leaped and died, and Ambler's eyes were first clear and shining and then dusky and dreamy, and her slender fingers were busied with her hair, twisting it into long and heavy plaitings. "I have stayed at home so long I really would like to go away," Aunt Molly added.

"Oh, Aunt Molly!" in quick dismay. "Can't you manage to do it? Couldn't we get some one to

stay here with me? I don't believe I should be afraid to stay alone!"

"The idea!"

"I might."

"Why couldn't you go too?" Aunt Molly had fired her first gun, and skilfully.

"I!" asked Ambler in amazement. "I couldn't leave now."

"Who said anything about going now? But in the summer when there is nothing in particular to look after —"

"Oh, well; maybe we might manage it then." But summer was far off; Ambler dismissed the thought of it. She moved slowly about the room, turning down the thick covers on the wide bed, closing the shutters for the night.

At the last window she lingered. The night was warm and soft, presaging spring; the stars faint and large and luminous with a mist between them and the earth. The smell of burnt leaves and smouldering sedge hung like a pungent breath beneath the trees; and the song of the stream was sweet.

"Ambler, you'll catch cold, leaning out of that window half-dressed. The room is chilly already." But Miss Molly, spite of her soft scolding, looked content. Her lips were pursed together thoughtfully and she rocked softly.

Day by day she grew more determined. The oak no sooner put out its buds, the grass no earlier greened, the apple-trees were no sooner abloom, than Miss Molly began to be bolder in her hints.

They went unheeded. Miss Molly found a yellow advertisement, cut out the pictured house with its pillared porch and cottages and rolling lawn, and stuck it in the frame of the looking-glass.

"What's this?" asked Ambler carelessly, as she stopped before the mirror to straighten her hair.

"That!" in pretended amazement. "Don't you know that place?"

"No," serenely.

Miss Molly, with an attempt at asperity, named a resort in the mountains still farther toward the west, the place where the family had been wont to flock. "I used to go there every summer when I was a girl." She sighed softly. "Oh, Amber," she cried with sudden burst of frankness, "I wish you could go, just once. I wish you could see it, what it is like; and the people —" Her voice trailed off. Ambler had turned slowly, uplifted brush in hand; her eyes were wide with astonishment. "I don't see why we can't go this summer!" And Aunt Molly had opened full artillery.

She watched Ambler's dismay with confidence. She knew her niece and reckoned wisely on Ambler's traits. The thing she wanted to do she knew was out of all keeping with her niece's desires; but then Ambler had the rare quality of loving success and progress for their stimulus, and not for the money which they might bring. That, in her generous mind, was as much Aunt Molly's as her own and the older woman was welcome to the spending of it. The girl had thought of restoring rooms and of better barns, but Aunt Molly should have the thing she desired; and Aunt Molly's

old tales and memories and sudden confidences were like the working of a mine. By and by Ambler began to think of it as her aunt intended she should. She began to be anxious to go.

Miss Molly knew but one feminine nature. Women, nice women, were alike; men might be different. Give a woman a taste of what she should have, and the rest would follow. What woman did not love pretty clothes? Ambler would, if she knew what they were. And if the niece lacked knowledge, the aunt did not. Was there any art of old-time beguilement — old, as the world, alas! and new as to-day, and lasting long as the love of man will warm to its witchery — was there one she did not know? Little tricks of beauty which a man would smile to see, and love the dainty sorceress the better for his knowledge. Aunt Molly could have charmingly drilled the maid she loved; but she must be wary, for field lore and wood lore and horse lore were Ambler's loves.

The aunt began with dresses. Briar Park's mail was suddenly heavy with advertisements. Aunt Molly unfastened with delight the brass holdings to fat envelopes and sent the colorings fluttering. Pink for Ambler, or blue, or white; or corn-color with lines of ebony velvet to give distinction, or roses scattered on pale gauze?

The dressmaker that the schemer was driven to consult and to bring, at last, to Briar Park, grew as enthusiastic as herself. Ambler laughed at both and stood impatiently while they snipped and smoothed and fitted; but there came a day when, with ruffles

about her feet and fluffy bodice upon her shoulders, slipping her bare neck, she wondered if the girl the glass gave back were herself. Her dark eyes sparkled at the reflection.

"Wait," she cried impulsively. "I must have a rose for here and here," touching her bodice lightly. "I know the very buds. They bloomed to-day;" and she was out of the big room in a flash, her pink skirts lighting the old hall, as the apple-blossoms had brightened The Park.

The women by the bed and its heaped finery laughed softly at the swift patter of her feet and the first flash of her enthusiasm; and they broke into congratulations. They did not notice that Ambler was long in finding a rose.

When the girl ran down the moss-grown steps with her skirts lifted daintily and her gaze on the buds she had seen that morning, she ran almost against Jenifer. He needed consent for some intended work, and came to get it.

"Oh!" cried Ambler softly, her dropped skirts swirling about her, her hands clasped in swift dismay, — she felt as if she were playing a masquerade. Her cheeks were pinker than her gown; Jenifer's white as the syringa blossoms behind him.

Something in his eyes, in the tenseness of his face, made the girl saucily defensive. "It is Aunt Molly's choice," she announced, pulling herself together and turning slowly, like a preening bird. "Do you like it?"

"It is beautiful," said Jenifer, with stifled voice.

"Ah! I like it myself," she admitted naively.

But the thought of herself and her gown was gone in the next breath. "You know we are going next week?" she asked.

"Joshua told me. And so —" Jenifer spoke quickly of the business which had brought him.

Ambler's fingers fumbled with the roses as she listened; Jenifer cut them, laid them in her hands, and, with a gaze that swept bare, rounded neck and dimpled arms and slender form and down-drooped lids, dropped the branches behind him.

The girl went soberly up the steps.

It seemed incongruous, all that Aunt Molly planned. Better the easy dress, the light-hearted awakening, the sound of the stream, and the sight of empurpled peaks. What did she care for the crowds, or for the gaiety that had been so brightly pictured, while the laurel bloomed like drifting snow between the boulders, and the fox-grape hid its clustered blossoms?

To leave these! and for what? She would be bored to death where there were people to be forever talked to; tired to extinction where there were always watching eyes; wearied past endurance by the things Aunt Molly cared for.

But she was not! Aunt Molly had well gauged the young girl's heart. The loving manœverer but slipped the hood upon her falcon's eyes to let her see. It was a pastime flight, no warfare; and the aunt had been sure of the graceful sweep; nor was she wrong. Some prisoned spirit seemed to break its bars within Ambler's heart: it ruled her with a wand whose witchery reached to others.



Ambler was new and fresh to the life. The blue of Aunt Molly's eyes deepened as she watched the girl come into what she had desired for her, beauty, brightness, laughter ringing true from ready lips, quick and kindly speech: and eyes of others to see, and ears of others to hear.

It was dreadful to Miss Molly to turn her back upon the places of her victory. Ambler seemed not to care. She ticked off on impatient fingers the hours of their journey homeward. "Seven hours — five — four — three — one! We're nearly there, Aunt Molly, nearly home! Will Joshua come to meet us? Oh," in whispered rapture, "here we are!"

The wheels whined against the rails, the store slid into view, the waiting-shed. "Oh, oh," in ecstasy. "Look, Aunt Molly, look!"

Joshua, too erect to do more than turn his head, sat in the buggy, which was shining with fresh paint. The old negro himself had bedecked it with patient hands, "to see de ladies home." Joshua's fingers, for all their pretended tightness on the reins, trembled as he slowly turned his head. "Gawd's sake!" he cried, as Ambler flitted down the steps.

The girl wore the gown she had donned before she went away, and it showed its wearing, but the conductor stood with bared head, the brakeman's arms were filled with wraps, the porter grinned near by; and the train that should have been flying was held till the conductor accompanied the young woman to her carriage steps.

Joshua looked at the straight uniformed figure that,

with its hand still on the bell-cord, leaned to gaze, and at the laughing women. His welcome was short, his words were few; but the old darkey could have cried as Bill took up his steady trot.

He knew those wiles, those smiles and glancings from beneath dark lashes, those demure allurements. They belonged to the women of his house; and he had thought them lost. "Miss Amblah had done foun' 'em somewhar, an' fotch 'em home. Praise Gawd! Hallelu!"

It was a day or two before Joshua wondered on whom these blandishments could be practised. He might have spared himself anxiety. There had been a young man at The Springs who made haste to remember a cousin dwelling in the neighborhood; and the proudest day the old negro had known was when a strange horseman found his way along the road that wound to Briar Park.

Joshua took the visitor's horse and showed the young man into the big bare hall, turning away chuckling.

He went into the dismantled parlor where the wind sighed through broken window-panes, and opened the door that led into the library beyond, where the hearth was filled with fallen bricks; and he shook his grizzled head. The others, those "boys Miss Amblah had done growed up wid" had not mattered; but this, a stranger! "She'll hab to tek her chances," the old man muttered. "She'll hab to tek her chances."

They were good as far as this visitor was concerned. The man was handsome, and his city-dwelling family

unimpeachable. If Aunt Molly had carved him from her old romances, he could not have been better fashioned. He sang, he danced, he rode; he was clever in the new games of which Miss Molly knew not even the names; and he could make a living. Miss Molly had taken the pains to inquire.

It seemed as if Victory, who had so long pointed the backward tips of his pinions toward her, faced her now with full sweep of his magnificent wings. For the young man was undeniably in love, and Ambler was — “was interested,” the spinster softly whispered to herself. Further, modesty would not penetrate. How could Aunt Molly dream that the stir of love might be in a young woman’s pulses and she mistake the man who had awakened it?

She made Ambler’s way too easy, and fostered the new interest too faithfully. Aunt Molly took to house-keeping, for Ambler must not be disturbed. She took to urging the young man, when he came, to stay to meals, whose bounty made Ambler flash mischievous glances towards Aunt Molly, whose flush betrayed her. And what places for love-making were the deep porch, the shadowed yard, and the borders of the stream!

Aunt Molly would shut her eyes and give fancy a loose rein, when she saw the flicker of Ambler’s white dress beneath the trees and the straight figure that attended. To have stood there herself, to have been slim and young and beautiful, to have heard hot words and felt her pulses thrill — If God had leaned to ask Aunt Molly name her heaven, so she would have termed it, had she the skill to divine the thing she most desired.

So she would have chosen for a space, while the High and Mighty Holies waited her tarrying steps.

So all things fostered the young love, — all but one.

Jenifer passed "Miss Amblah" in the dusk of a day that had been close and hot. It was late summer, and the cries of the katydids and crickets rasped him. He was tired; with work, he thought; but it was not that. Labor and hope were made man's blessing; labor and despair, his curse. Jenifer had come to the last.

By what path he had reached it he did not know, nor the name on the dark lintel of the house where he abode; but through his tired limbs and down his spent nerves the spirit of it ran and peered from his darkened eyes. Its chisellings deepened the lines upon his face, and curved his mouth. Even Lightfoot felt the lassitude of his touch upon her rein as she splashed through the water, her head drooping listlessly.

Meadow-sweet and queen's lace and yarrow bloomed high beside the stream, and brushed the horse's dappled sides. The apples were ripening. Their rich odor and the acrid smell of tasselled corn were in the air.

Jenifer heard a step amongst the apple-trees and a rustling of thick leaves, and, when he turned his head, he saw a slim, light-clad figure with arms uplifted and face upraised. The young man flung himself from his saddle and strode towards Ambler, bending his head beneath the branches.

She turned with the quick, merry air which was one of her new witcheries. She had been sometimes grave before and sometimes slow-spoken, with a wholesome laughter that waited for slender coaxing. Now the

very air about her seemed gay and touched with tenderness. She waited, one slender hand still on the bough, the loose sleeve slipping from her rounded arm, her laughing face gleaming in the dusk.

"I am counting them," she said gaily. "There are more apples than last year, twice more."

"Miss Ambler," — Jenifer ignored speech and laughter and any commonplace. He went straight to the question he meant to ask, — "Miss Ambler, you are to be married?"

The arm trembled a little on the apple-bough and she leaned her cheek against it. "Yes," she breathed.

"When?"

The sudden gravity of her face and the whiteness of her cheek he had never before seen. Her smile was wistful.

"In the fall — I am afraid," she whispered.

## XXII

A BEAM of light shone like a search-light through Jenifer's open door. It showed the clean bare floor, the black rough fireplace, the whitewashed walls, the low rafters, — and an untouched bed. Jenifer was moving slowly about the lean-to; his eyes were wide and bright from sleeplessness.

The sunshine lay warm on his doorstep. The shadow of the locust leaves flickered across it; and a white butterfly settled in the warmth, his wings fluttering in the faint wind that stole with morning up the Hollow. A catbird sang his liquid morning song amongst the willows. A listening mocking-bird caught up the song and broidered it, and flung it back in exultant ecstasy. The sound of the stream was strong and musical. In the jubilant waking world the man alone was desperate.

The night had brought Jenifer no rest, the morning no freshness. Lightfoot was whinnying in her stall, and he crossed the wet grass listlessly, and loosed and fed her. At the shelter door he stood irresolute. The drenched grass sparkled at his feet, the dew dripped from the bent ferns, and, shining amongst them, a cluster of pinks flared their crimson to the sun.

Jenifer stooped to them suddenly, and, as a step crashed in the thicket, strode across the clearing, down

the rough path to the stream, sprang over it, and up the mountainside.

Where the brook came leaping down above Jenifer's cabin, it curved close beside the beetling peak, and the rushing water cut beneath the trees. The rocks piled high in the stream's bed; and the spot was as remote as if no man had ever found his way into the pockets of the peaks.

In the deep shadows, Jenifer was indistinguishable; at his feet the stream split into a hundred rills and spun its threads of brown, or bubbled in deep worn hollows. Ferns rose up beneath his hand. Lichens clad the rocks. Up the peak the sweet-gum flickered a flag of red, setting the earliest danger signal for the frost.

Jenifer's thought, the worse for him, was clear. He could follow the steps of his life, at last; and to gauge them was agony. He bent his arms upon his knees and leaned his face within his hands; and, as the water ran, so there slipped before him hour and day and deed. Suddenly, at some stinging memory, he straightened and flung his arm despairingly above his head. The gesture was seen by one who, keen-eyed, climbed the wood.

Wooten, slipping down the mountainside, and springing from rock to rock, unheard above the water's rush, swung himself down by Jenifer's side. Jenifer threw back his head. His eyes flamed with anger.

Wooten would not see it. "Son," he said with a hand on the young man's shoulder. "Son!"

Jenifer shook off the touch impatiently. The old



man looked down at his white face and tense mouth, and then at the foaming water. He glanced back again, quickly and keenly; and he settled himself imperturbably by Jenifer's side. He was shrewdly silent.

His pipe was in the sagging pocket of his coat, and Wooten lighted it, puffed slowly at it, and watched the curl of smoke float up beyond the rocks.

"Sort o' lazy day," he said as if in deep satisfaction.

A movement of Jenifer's shoulder was his only answer.

"Ain't got much to do now?"

"No."

"Sort o' breathin' space; summer work 'bout done, an' fall ain't sot in good."

"This worl' is a mighty good ol' place," the old man went on after a long silence, "mighty good. An' look like she's always tryin' to teach folks somethin'. Gives herself a long rest in winter an' a spell now an' then when she's settled down to business good an' steady, like nowabouts. But lan', we don't learn a thing. We go her one better every time, an' work day in an' day out; an' some ain't got no mo' sense than to be proud of it. 'Tain't so intended. Son," turning to Jenifer, "you've been workin' too hard yourself; never no res' right straight along from the day you first started down thar," with a wave of his hand in the direction of the Hollow's mouth.

"You've been sort o' peaked like ever since — lan', I don't know when! Ain't gettin' the fever?" he asked anxiously. "Lemme feel your pulse." The old man's hand was on Jenifer's wrist before the younger thought to evade him. "Hm! Lemme see your tongue. Good

lan', you needn't get so mad about it. Ain't you nussed me? Ain't you sot up with Hutchins night after night? Ain't you done look after Stith when he was down? Don't you expect nobody to do nothing for you when you need it?" the old man demanded wrathfully.

Jenifer's curt assurance that he was all right was not satisfying.

"U-m!" said Wooten, settling back against the rocks. "Nices' place I've found for a long time. Goin' to stay all day? Shucks! I didn't mean right here, in this pertickler spot. Sun would strike you 'long 'bout evenin', an' set you sizzlin'. But here — home?"

Jenifer assented.

"Good thing, too." Wooten stretched out his long legs and pulled at his nearly empty pipe. A yellow bird flitted from rock to rock, and the old man's gaze followed it carelessly. It took sudden flight downward, and dipped into the stream beyond; Wooten's glance fell on the pinks that wilted by the young man's side.

The flowers accused him. The old man's heart had been wrung with anxiety: now amusement bubbled in its place. He chuckled to himself. Was this it? The cure was the easiest in the world. If the boy had been getting sick! — But this!

"That Miss Amblah down thar turn clean out this summer," he began, striking his subject lightly.

"Got a beau, too," probing deeper, and with mischievous intent. "Good lookin'?"

"Good enough," Jenifer assented shortly.

"You don't say so," innocently. "Rich?"

"I don't know."

"Good match?"

"I suppose so." Jenifer's lips were tight pressed.

"Married soon?"

"What do you want to know for? What have you got to do with it?" Jenifer's face was as white as the foam. His eyes blazed; but Wooten only chuckled gracelessly.

"I sort o' thought — I sort o' thought —"

The clutch of Jenifer's hand on the preacher's knee was like the closing of a steel spring; but the old mountaineer feared no man on earth; this man least of all. He was angered to further daring.

"I sort o' thought you wanted her yourself," he drawled. "Here! Sit down! None o' that foolishness. Think you could hurt me? Get back thar! Son! Son!" Jenifer had loosened his furious hold, slipped down on the rock, and hidden his face on his arm.

"Son!" Wooten's touch upon the lowered head was infinitely tender and his face was as white as the leaping water. "Couldn't you git her?" he whispered.

"I never tried."

"Why?"

Jenifer threw back his head. He gazed straight up into the old man's shrewd, hurt eyes. "Because I — I have a wife."

"Sho!" The old man's eyes flashed like steel. He reddened from the open collar of his shirt to his sun-burned hair. "Shucks!" he said under his breath.

"Whar?"

"Home."

"Yours or hers?"

"Hers," shortly.

"And you here?"

Jenifer's gesture was hopeless. It dismissed the subject. His admission had been made.

"Tired o' her?"

Jenifer clenched his hands.

"Think anything o' her now?"

God, what questions! Jenifer had asked them of himself: and he had answered.

"Does she care for you?"

"No," was wrung from him.

"Some other man?"

Wooten saw his answer on Jenifer's face.

"Let her have him; and take the woman you want."

The old man squared his shoulders. His hands were on his hips; his eyes were fiery. "Think because you marry a woman once you got to hang on to her an' let her dog the life out o' you, an' you worry hers out o' her. Think you got to stay with her day in an' day out? Got to stick to her whether you want to or not? You make yourself miserable, an' her miserable, an' maybe somebody else, too. For what?"

Jenifer smiled bitterly. His scorn of Grame was too deep for him to have included the Englishman in his reckoning. But Alice! As he felt, with that agony riving his heart, was it so she had loved the man? And might her step not have been taken as ignorantly as he had trodden his own way of passion? But his common sense beat back. He knew her shallowness and that her loves were material. But his knowledge had dawned

too late, and he had made her as well as himself pay the price of his ignorance.

He had acted masterfully and swiftly; and he had kept himself to the thing he had vowed. Now, doubt swept him like a tide. He had seen all night, through the illuminating flash of his agony, Alice's frightened face, or the tower with its crown of fire, or the blackened house with smoke drifting about its fallen chimneys.

He knew he loved Ambler beyond his dream of man's possible passion; he had put away his wife, yet held her to the bond, her and himself; and Ambler would marry a man he hated because that man dared to love her and was free when he himself was bound. He had overridden all other intricacies and questioned his action in none: before this, Jenifer was helpless.

"Son," said Wooten steadily, "when you come into the Hollow I know 'twas somethin' behin' pushin' you: but it made no difference. I know a man when I see him, an' I knew you were one. Such you have lived right here. But now —" The old man stood silent, and there was something stern in his look.

"This ain't all. Somethin' else is twistin' it up; an' you done tol' enough to let the res' follow. 'Tain't no use to keep things hid up all the time. You done kep' things too long to yourself. You been goin' too long single-handed. 'Tain't good for you."

Jenifer's silence was unbroken. The old man sat down patiently by his side.

"Thar ain't no man nor woman nor chile in the Hollow that don't like to see you goin' up an' down the ways; an' you know, an' we know, how you've

help when you've had a chance, help mo' than you ought. Now" — the prophet blazing up within him — "thar's a new path. 'Tain't so clear," with fervid gaze upward, "but I see it. Thar's somethin' waitin' for you to do. You done learned your lesson here. Son," leaning forward, "you goin' tell me the thing that brought you here; an' maybe we'll see the way that takes you out. Maybe! I don't want you to go. I want you right here. But now — 'tis time to speak."

"Speak!" In the primitiveness of each nature was the strongest bond Jenifer had ever known. The tense lines of Jenifer's face relaxed. His eyes burned into the preacher's face.

He began slowly, a broken word, a phrase, a sentence; they ran together, were continuous. Long pauses were between his sentences. Here but a word or two told all he meant to tell, the preacher's fancy filling in between.

"God!" said Wooten once.

And then an oath.

"God-a-mighty!"

Then silence. Jenifer had ended and Wooten rose stiffly to his feet.

On one point he had put his finger. He had questioned and cross-questioned the manner of Jenifer's wealth-getting, and he understood.

"Son," he said, swaying upon his feet, "son" — his scorn was magnificent — "I never stole."

## XXIII

"LORD! Whar is he? 'Tain't a night and day since I left him, an' he didn't say a word 'bout not bein' here; an' now he's gone. I said wrong. I done said wrong. I done egged him on; an' he needed to be holp. He was clean down, an' I—I tol' the truth; the truth," the old man defended himself. "But he's gone. Didn't say a word to you? Didn't leave no word for me? Lan' o' Goshen, Mary, whar do you s'pose he is?"

Mary's bonnet had fallen back from her head. Her ruddy hair shone in the red light of the setting sun; and the wildness in Wooten's eyes was reflected in her own. He had seized her wrists as he talked.

"Ain't nothin' gone but the clothes he come here in, an' his hoss; but that's all he brought with him. Gawd!" Wooten groaned, "Gawd-a-mighty! Everything jus' as he lef' it. It looks like he's dead, dead an' gone for good. Was this do' open, jus' this way?"

The door of Jenifer's cabin swung wide. Yellow locust leaves blew in across the sill. A squirrel ran on the roof, and chattered angrily at the man and woman in the little clearing. The sun was below the peaks, and the green-lipped Hollow a chalcedony cup filled to its brim with golden vapor for the drinking of the



god whose gray wings trailed slowly across the high valleys.

"You come this mornin'?" Wooten demanded.

The woman nodded.

"Nobody here?"

"Jus' like this," Mary's soft voice assured him.

"An' again to-night?"

"Again to-night."

"We done lost him. He's come, an' he's gone; an' we —" a sudden thrill shook the old man. His grasp on Mary's strong wrists tightened. The woman, with lips apart and head flung back, listened.

The golden sky was clear from peak to peak. No feather of cloud flecked it. The wind was strong, of the north; the air vibrant, resonant. A whisper stole down the gorge. No leaf had made it; nor breath of human given it voice. It was an echo of a song, the strain itself, sweet and seizing upon the heart. Full and clear it filled the Hollow and rippled up above the mountain-tops to spill its melody upon the hills.

"God!" whispered Wooten, the sweat thick on his forehead, "The Voice; 'an summah-time! The Voice!" rigid till the strain died away. "A sign; 'tis a sign!" He flung the woman's wrists from him. "Preachin'," cried the zealot, "thar'll be preachin' on the mountain to-night. Pass the word! Pass the word!" His voice rang back as he sprang across the rocks towards the trail.

The woman ran fleet as a deer towards her cabin. In a moment her boy sped the message along the paths. Wooten called it to a cabin; its inmates to another;

and from that a "Ye-o — ho-e — ho!" rang to the hut across a deep, tree-shadowed chasm.

Torch-light flared up beneath the still's roof. On the planks sat awed men and frightened women. Wooten's voice rang down the mountain's side, and the boulders flung back the echoes of his denunciations against sin, picturing that hell which yawns for sinners, till the glare and hiss of its eternal fires seemed but beyond the wall of friendly darkness.

Stealing, the preacher shouted about; and the sinewy, weather-worn men were afraid to turn face to face. One remembered the rails he had filched to build his pen; his neighbor, the shoat which should have been in some man's yard, but the sweet meat of which was now cooling in the flow of his own spring; and in the dusky corner the man who shielded his eyes with hardened hand saw a dewy night, young slips of trees in fresh, red earth, and himself stealthily loosening the slender roots and piling higher the bundle. The fruit of the tree by his door was suddenly distasteful. But these trifles were between neighbors. It was not of these the preacher thought, but of those who robbed great things, and did it knowingly. For such the mountain had its own law.

Jenifer, that night, sped down the mountains. A waved lantern had flagged a fast train which wound its way across the peaks far from the Hollow, climbing and doubling on its way, sailing across bridged chasms and rocky runs, down towards towns and cities and spreading fields; and, in the morning, by the tide.

Mists clung above low lands and wide and blue a

river ran beyond the rails. Tide-swept marshes crept to the road-bed, and at blazing noon the wide, deep, salt harbor of a city near the sea lay beneath his unseeing eyes.

The sun still shone hot and dazzling when Jenifer swung himself up the dust encrusted steps of the short, slow train which clanked its way through the Carolina woods. The conductor was not the man he had known and chaffed at the road-crossing by the swamp; by chance the few passengers of that day were alike strange, and, as they gathered on the friendly seats which boxed the empty stove in the first compartment of the coach, foregathering with one another, Jenifer was left to the rear, which was arranged in ordinary fashion, and to the wooden seats, the open windows, with the dust blowing through, and to the dank smell of the swamps, the clean breath of the pines, and the first glimpse of the cotton-fields.

The leaves were green with a burst of white here and there along the lines of husky pods; the tall corn had tasselled, and the ripple of its ribbons ran to the line of dusky pines. The tobacco was gray-green and broad and strong. The land ran level, spread like a die; live-oaks grew in the sand, with a pale gleam of mistle-toe between lusty leaves; the moss-covered shingles of an old church, a thicket of cedar and gall-berries, — then the rails were lowered for the track to spin across a wide and sandy road. Jenifer swung himself from the train when the engine wheels ground by the cypress-bowered tank.

The store, with its evening shadows, the gin, the

whitewashed fences, the shining oaks about the house, the long white way, — Jenifer might have left them yesterday. But across the track was change. A high paling shut in a wide yard, and above the fencing showed chimney stacks. As Jenifer stood uncertain where first to turn, a cart whirled from the gate, and, the driver standing straight, but swaying to the cart's lurch like a sailor to his ship, sped up the road in a cloud of golden dust. Life was there, and Jenifer crossed to seek it.

The yard, to his astonished gaze, showed thick powdered dust, with line upon line of cart-wheels cut into it. The building was large. A wide porch ran before it. Heavy scales were on the porch, and sacks of peanuts; and, by them, Mr. Cross.

He was weighing the sacks carefully, and his back was towards the newcomer, as was that of the farmer who watched the lines upon the measuring-rod as keenly as the weigher.

"Fifty-six pounds," Mr. Cross announced. "Three and a half cents a pound; that's what I am paying."

"Go ahead," said the farmer tersely. But Jenifer's step sounded on the porch. Both men turned. The sack Mr. Cross had lifted rattled on the scales. "Great Governors!" he cried; "name o' wonder! *Jenifer!*" He sprang towards the young man, and Jenifer grasped him eagerly by the hand.

In spite of the purpose to whose wished-for swiftness of fulfilment the speeding train was like a becalmed ship, Jenifer's delight was keen at the warmth of welcome. His tense mouth curved with sudden, wistful

pleasure. "Didn't look for me?" he asked boyishly. "Didn't hear the train?"

"Lord, no; half the time I don't know when it comes or goes. But now — Here, Dick, weigh up for yourself. Put the memorandum here," throwing a small book and a pencil on the long arm of the scales. "Come on in. Now!" as they stood in the big, machinery filled room, and the two men fell back from each other, measuring one another with friendly challenge.

Jenifer, raw with introspection, flushed hotly.

Mr. Cross was quick to see it and relieved the tension. "Well, I would have known you anywhere. You haven't changed much. Yes, you have, too. Thin as a rail, and — Lord, what does that matter? Glad enough to see you back. You were long enough coming. Lots of change here, right here." There was an awkwardness in the moment. Jenifer was too bent on his purpose to talk easily till that should be accomplished; and Mr. Cross's mind was whirling with the thoughts which had stolen often through it and were now rushing to a swift focus. Neither, for all their sudden flush of pleasure, knew what to say. "Put up this factory since you left."

"I see."

"I just want you to go over it. You are going to stay for awhile?"

"I — If you will have me," with sudden change from his first uncertainty, a change caused by the expression on his listener's face.

Something in Jenifer's steady eyes sent a thrill of hope along Mr. Cross's nerves. Long ago he had blamed

himself for the thing he had allowed the boy to do. They had been right, both of them, only day by day he had seen a higher way and its possibilities for others: and he would have set out to correct what he now thought wrong had he not dreaded to seek Jenifer out. Only at the bank was there news of the young man, and that brief and bare.

"When did you start this?" Jenifer asked, breaking the awkwardness.

"Last year." Mr. Cross clutched at the chance of talk. "Paying well, too. All the farmers about here taking to raising peanuts, nothing but peanuts. Come along; let's go over it; or stop, right here's the spot to start with." The place was filled with machinery, with running belts, and whirling dust, and huge hoppers on the floor. "See these hoppers, that's where we begin. Pour the nuts right in here, just like they come out of the sacks; they are full now, you see; and then — You'll have to go up on the third floor to see the next thing. You're not afraid of dust?"

Jenifer's short laugh was so clearly one of amusement that Mr. Cross ran up the steep stair. Cushions of dust on the rails loosened and besprinkled them. Their steps left firm print on the gray-powdered steps. The air from floor to rafter was awirl with dust under the sloping roof, and the windows in the gables were opened wide.

"You see those cylinders?" One after another the rolls of hollow steel glittered down the room, and the mighty belts kept them whirling. "The nuts are inside there, the nuts poured into the hoppers below;

that threshes out the dirt, and fans them clean, and sends them out down the chutes to the sorting-room. That's the greatest place in the building." Mr. Cross turned as if to go there at once, but Jenifer walked quickly towards the wide window, and stood looking out.

"Fine view of the country from here," said Mr. Cross behind the young man's sturdy shoulder.

"Yes," answered Jenifer dreamily. "Many changes?" he asked after a second's silence.

"Well, we've taken to raising peanuts; that's about all."

"Harrell still living here?"

A quick measuring glance from Mr. Cross, and again that stir of hope. "Jack? Yes."

"And — And the little teacher?" Jenifer stammered over the title; but pupil and patron and friend alike had used it. No other seemed natural.

"Yes," slowly.

"They're married, I suppose."

"No."

"Why?" sharply.

"Haven't got money enough. Takes money to get married as well as for anything else."

"I thought you said the farmers were doing well," Jenifer demanded.

"So they are, some of them; Jack, too, fairly. But he's got a load to carry. Two cantankerous women, and Bess —"

"There's nothing the matter with her?"

"No."

"She's still teaching?"



"Gave it up long ago. Has to stay at home with her mother, and a precious hard time she has of it, too." Mr. Cross knew. He had helped all he dared and the store ledger showed long unbalanced accounts. "Some things seem a little too hard," he added sententiously, thinking of Harrell with his handicap of querulous women-folk, Bess with her sick mother; and poverty for both, while the laden cars came day by day out from that land that had been Harrell's and trailed their way across the low fields. Had Jenifer crossed the older man's path he would have learned his thoughts, and plainly; but though lightning quick in business affairs, Mr. Cross willingly awaited a slow Providence in finer matters. He smiled shrewdly as Jenifer asked: "Is Harrell at home?"

"Yes. Never anywhere else, unless he is over to see Bess. Come on; want to see the sorting-room?" Mr. Cross asked, turning abruptly.

Jenifer followed, heeding neither step nor stair nor room filled with machinery. At the end of it Mr. Cross opened a door. The room beyond was crowded with negro men and women. They stood in straight rows, and beltings ran beneath their hands, and carried with them a stream of peanuts. The black deft fingers tossed here the dark nuts and there the light, and left the best; so sorting them.

"That's all," said Mr. Cross shortly, "cleaning them, sorting them, bagging them; that's all a peanut factory is for. Now —"

Jenifer's hand was on Mr. Cross's shoulder. He leaned to make himself heard. "I am going away for

a while. I shall be back by dark," and before Mr. Cross could say a word, Jenifer was hurrying down the dusty stairs. But the older man smiled as he turned to watch the workers.

Down the sandy road, where the smell of the corn and the breath of the great swamp were in the air, Jenifer strode. His wrestling and agony had ceased. He felt the stealing of peace into his heart, and though the way was long, the weed-grown fence corners seemed to slip past him, as his fancy pictured, in the sunlit road, the trooping children, the shining pails, the slender teacher, and Harrell waiting by the way. How had he forgotten? Why had he been so long in seeing? How had he lived in such content and satisfaction?

Here were Harrell's fields. There was no plowman in the cotton rows, no traveller in the lane nor lounge in the far yard; but down between the pines came a man with slow step and bent head, and a gun tucked in the hollow of his arm; and the figure seemed familiar.

Jenifer hurried. "Harrell!" he shouted, so elated himself that he did not think of what the other might feel. "Harrell!"

Harrell jerked up his head, bent by no pleasant dream. The little school-teacher's mother was worse. She could eat nothing Bess could find for her; and Harrell had shot a brace of young squirrels in the woods, and carried them to her. He had been thinking, beneath the pines, of Bessie's face, how thin the cheek was and dark-circled her eyes. Her figure had drooped listlessly against the gate when he looked back, her bonnet had

slipped from her sunny hair, but there was no sauciness about her red mouth nor daring in her eyes. Things had cut, at last, too deep.

In the dusk of the trees Harrell could not at once distinguish the man who had called him. Jenifer clasped his arm impulsively before Harrell knew who it was. Then a flame of red ran up his worn face. "You!" he cried. "You! You scoundrel!"

Jenifer might have berated himself and scorned himself, but that name he had not deserved. The worst that he had done was but a loose acceptance of legal standards. As soon as he saw it — that touch of superstition in the gray church beneath the oaks had been forgotten like a dream, and had been part of one in his hazy memory till both had faded — as soon as he saw, his attempt to act was instant.

"You lie," he cried hoarsely.

"I — I —" Fury choked Harrell. He clutched his gun impotently in his rage; then remembered that he held it. The barrel was at Jenifer's breast.

Jenifer's blow was like a flash, but it did not fall before Harrell's finger had found the trigger, and as the sharp report rang out Harrell rolled by the roadside.

"Lawd! Gawd!" screamed a negro running through the woods. "Marse Har'll done shot!" He sprang over the fence, raced down the road, panting his cry, till at the factory gate he had but breath to repeat it.

"Who done it?" The crowd jostled him. "What's that you say?" "Where's Mr. Cross." "Dead?" "Where's the man?" the clamor broke out. There was a crowd ready to hand. The factory workers, the

clerks, a belated farmer, a man they overtook, — Mr. Cross kept his place in front.

“If I had told him — If I had kept him! I knew how Jack felt. I’ve seen it growing. He was fairly mad over it. I knew he had no good blood for the boy, and I let Jenifer go!” He accused himself at every step.

“I knew what he came for,” the voice within him went on. “I knew the moment I set eyes on his face. I knew he was coming, too, some day. I’ve been a fool. God, there he is! Stand back! Wait!” His gesture commanded. “I’m going to speak to him first. Wait! You hear what I say.” And Mr. Cross strode forward.

“Jenifer!”

Jenifer had been walking slowly and easily. His eyes opened wide at sight of the crowd and sound of Mr. Cross’s cry.

“What’s the matter?” he asked carelessly.

“Hold on there!”

“What else do you think I am going to do?” Jenifer’s laugh was as light-hearted as a boy’s.

“God, man, hush!” Mr. Cross shuddered at the sound.

“Hush? For what? What’s the matter with you anyway? All that crowd, and —”

“Whar’s Harrell?”

“Take him!”

The crowd surrounded them, a ring of white and black.

“String him up!”

“Wait for the sheriff!”

"Hands off! Keep off, I say!" Mr. Cross slipped from his hip pocket his own pistol, and held it before him. He was close by Jenifer's side, and was pulling at him with his free arm, backing Jenifer into the shelter of a fence corner. "Get out your gun," he whispered to Jenifer hoarsely. "It's your life, this time. *Your life!* Don't you see?"

"Whar's Harrell? Whar's Harrell?"

Jenifer began to understand something of what that yelping crowd meant; but he was as calm as the day which neared its close. "Do you want to see?" he asked.

A hush fell on the crowd, a touch of solemnity. "Do you want to see?" he repeated, with a step forward.

"Stay where you are," Mr. Cross shouted, but Jenifer leaped the ditch. Mr. Cross stood again by his side.

"I'll show you," declared Jenifer, an odd smile twitching at his lips, a smile which maddened the crowd.

"No foolishness." Mr. Cross stood between Jenifer and the men who closed up to him. "We'll see this thing out, but mind you—" He caught up with Jenifer, flung his arm above his head in warning—the pistol glinting in his hand—and again caught Jenifer by the arm.

Jenifer's head was high, his step steady. He was no more afraid than when he sauntered down the empty road. He passed the gate to Harrell's place. The pines darkened the way. The negroes huddled together and the white men peered fearfully between

the trees. What dread thing might they not find? But they came out between fields where the light of day still held, where fences were ill-kept and fields unplowed; and the crowd went on, awed and hushed. They neared *her* house.

Jenifer walked on without a turn of his head. He did not glance at Mr. Cross lest he should betray himself; for first he had been furiously angered, and now he was shaken with laughter that was the more intense for the tragedy that dogged his heels.

He opened the gate, where the mulberries came down like guards about the yard, and faced the crowd across it with a gesture commanding silence. Then with a wave of his hand he pointed across the yard.

On a narrow bench between two trees sat a man. His back was towards the gate. A girl was by his side, and his arm was about her waist. The man was Harrell.

A slow breath heaved the breasts of the white men; a low cry ran from negro to negro: then suddenly a cheer echoed to the house, and the crowd poured across the weed-grown level. But Jenifer stood at the gate.

"Jack!" Mr. Cross had gasped. "God! Jenifer, why didn't you speak? What did you do? There was something. What was it?"

Jenifer had no time for answer. The crowd had closed about the pair, but a way was suddenly made between it. A slender figure came flying out across the grass and flung herself upon Jenifer. "I am so glad, so happy!" Bess cried, her head upon Jenifer's arm. She lifted it in a second, slipped her brown hands

up to Jenifer's cheeks, pulled his head down to meet her lips, and kissed him solemnly.

"There!" she cried springing back and laughing wilfully. "There!" as if that kiss repaid everything. "Don't say a word," she said with imperious, happy face, turning to face Harrell and those who had caught up with him, "not a word!"

But the crowd had said too much not many moments earlier: and there could be no feud between two men who looked at one another as Harrell and Jenifer did.



## XXIV

"JENIFER, I want to know about this thing. 'Tain't worth while for me to beat about the bush and hint and wait to see if you are going to tell me. I want to know."

Mr. Cross's business instincts demanded accurate renderings. They rejected such generalities as an impulsive arm on a young man's shoulder, the shout of a crowd too easily led, or the blurted sentences of a joy-drunk man. Besides, he had let Jenifer go too unfriended before and he would make no such blunder again, but first he wanted to know where Jenifer stood.

The voices of the last of the store crowd sounded faint from the road. It was midnight, but the loungers had just left. They had pretended that the whole matter was a huge jest. Their friendliness to Jenifer had been in shame of their suspicions; their laughter and chaffing of one another and the parts they had played was the smoothing of an affair which showed an ugly side, but would go down in their chronicles as a joke.

"Jack was some mad?" questioned the older man with a laugh.

The dark hid the sudden red of Jenifer's face. What had happened and what had been said was between Harrell and Jenifer alone.

"Tried to shoot you?" Mr. Cross insisted.

"You see I am safe."

"Some foundation for that darkey's yarn; what was it?"

"We — we had a word or two," reluctantly.

"Scuffle?"

"Yes."

"I might have known it. I was a fool to let you start off without warning you. Jack's been growing bitter. Things getting harder, and his mind always on that money you had, and he thinking he ought to have it, or part of it."

"He could have had it all."

"Of course, if he had known, long ago."

"To-day."

"What?"

"It was what I came for —"

"You were a long time about it," dryly.

"If you thought so, if you thought he ought to have had it at first why didn't you speak then?" demanded Jenifer in sudden heat.

"Because most likely I should have done what you did, if I had had the chance."

"What changed you? You are ready enough to blame me," Jenifer persisted angrily.

"Pshaw! you are not going to get mad now. It's too late. Well," he added slowly, "I suppose it was seeing them, seeing Jack and Bess. What's Jack going to do?"

"Get married," tersely; "in a month." Jenifer remembered how Bess had drooped against Harrell's

shoulder, how the wild flower bloom had blossomed on her cheek and the long lashes curled above her misty eyes, when Harrell, without a question to her, had so announced it.

"You don't say? He's losing no time and he's right. Going to fix up the place and live there, I suppose; and let his women-folks go off to the city. They've been crazy about it for I don't know how long. Hope they'll be satisfied. Jack will be, I'll be bound." Mr. Cross sat silent for a moment. A mocking-bird was singing somewhere in the swamp, and they could hear the gurgle of the water about the cypress-knees.

"So you fixed it up," the older man again insisted, "and Bess had a hand in it."

"He left it to her to decide."

"Hm! And when you started along back —"

"I met you."

Mr. Cross laughed. "Sort of surprised, weren't you?"

"I think it was the other way, rather," declared Jenifer dryly.

"I should say so. Well, it will be a mighty long time before we forget this night. Sleepy?"

"No."

"I am." Mr. Cross stood up, and stretched his arms lazily above his head. "Come on to the house and go to bed. Lots more time to say everything. You are going to stay a long time?"

"Till to-morrow," said Jenifer absently.

"To-morrow! That's nonsense. You are not going then."

"I must."

"What's taking you?" Mr. Cross pulled himself up abruptly. He remembered with dismay that Jenifer had not spoken a word of himself beyond those in connection with Harrell, had not told from what point he had come, had said nothing of the place Mr. Cross heard he had bought, or of anything the years had brought into his life. Some blunt question was on his lips, but it remained unspoken. A touch of sternness in Jenifer and a hint of suffering forbade. The tall and well-knit man with his sunburned face and steady eyes was not the round, good-natured lad who had stood behind the store's wide counter, but a new man to be reckoned with. "You mustn't go so soon," said Mr. Cross lamely.

"I must catch that morning train," Jenifer declared. "Same hour?"

"The same." Mr. Cross locked the door behind him, and slipped the big key in his pocket; and the two men walked slowly by the whitewashed palings to the wide gate. It shut behind them, and the smell of the cape-jessamine from the narrow flower garden blew out beneath the trees.

"You will let us hear from you?" asked Mr. Cross, as he felt for the latch of the green-painted gate. "You are not going off as you did before? I won't have it. 'Tisn't right to drop out of people's sight that way."

"Don't fear. You will not forget me," said Jenifer with pretence of carelessness. "I'll not give you a chance. But I'll have to get up early for that train."

"You haven't forgotten the hour?" Mr. Cross asked with a short laugh.

"No. I'll be ready;" and Jenifer's door closed behind him.

Earlier that night, Jenifer would have given half of the fortune left to him for silence and solitude. Now the energy of action and the lassitude following accomplishment and the demand for easy friendliness left him spent. He undressed slowly and flung himself across the foot of the bed, gazing out at the blackness beneath the oaks.

How merciless is the soul, and how it holds to account the frail flesh that shelters it! How, in weariness and discouragement, does it scourge and scorn and lash, perhaps, to higher deeds! Work and companionship and clatter and sleep may hold it at bay, but there will come a time of silence, an hour of awakening in the night, and it challenges of the flesh: "What hast thou done? Where are thy ideals? Thy ambitions? Where have the wings of flight been dragged. Why hast thou folded them? Up! Wilt thou walk and have me halt by thee? Shall I go crippled?"

So the highest calls to the lowest and he who has learned the harmony between their warfare has learned to live. For Jenifer the way had been hard. His very faculty of seeing but one thing at a time worsted him and now that this thing had been accomplished what lay beyond?

He would gladly have laid down the possession of the Old Place and all that stung him concerning it. The sum he had set aside for Alice was all that Jenifer

had intended to stipulate should go untouched. That he felt he might rightfully claim; and had he stripped himself, as he had intended, Alice would still have been undisturbed. For himself he would fight out his fight, — in which poverty was the least obstacle — there in the Hollow.

What had his money brought him? Dazzling as its attainment had seemed, what did he care for it now? Was he afraid of hard living, of work? He laughed to himself at the thought, there in the fag-end of the night. What had Wooten said? — “Son, are you afeard o’ bein’ po’? Here’s a house an’ lan’, an’ both are yours. I don’t want ’em. One home is all I can live in. This is yours. An’ you are young an’ strong; an’ you don’t know what’s in store for you. Maybe it’s better than you think. Don’t you give up.”

Should he go back to the cabin? Was there not another call tugging at his heart?

The dawn showed to his tired eyes a clear world. The sky grew red above the swamp, the tops of cypress and gum and poplar pricked against it. The smell of the jessamine and of ripening scuppernongs and the dank odor of the swamp was in his room. With the whispering of the leaves and the rustling of the corn in his ears, with the sight of the silent store and empty gin, Jenifer felt as if some part of him had gone on living amongst them; as if he left it behind when the train pulled out across the wide white road and Mr. Cross, his tanned face thoughtful, turned away; when the cotton-rows sped past and the swamp was but a smudge upon the blue. For a second Jenifer longed to live it

out there, to try that life amongst the good-natured, easily excited, warm-hearted folk who had hated and praised him in an hour.

But the miles were behind him. The thought of what he should do next pressed closer. As lowlands and reedy creeks and flashing whitecaps sped from sight, perplexity and doubt were nearer. Once, when the train made long stop, a telephone receiver was in his hands. After this desertion and silence he had but to call up The Barracks across this distance, and with but one moment's wait for the electric flash and summons, he would know how those he had left there fared.

But he was not yet ready. The receiver slipped from his hand back upon its metal clasp: and far up on the mountainside, cold in the late summer's night, Jenifer swung himself from the coach, found Lightfoot, and took up the way by which he had come. It was dawn again when he rode up the trail.

Cobwebs were on the high grasses and between the willow branches, and across his door a film from side to side. Jenifer's smile, as he brushed it aside, was bitter. The cabin wore so soon an air of desertion. It seemed to complain that the breath of human had not been drawn within it, for Wooten had but wandered about it, Mary came only to the door; and the children peeped shyly through its windows.

Jenifer started a fire in the small stove and the thick smoke rolled up above the mud-daubed chimney.

Wooten saw it, and hurried down the mountain, running and stumbling. "Lan'," he panted at the cabin door, "lan' o' Goshen, is that you? I saw that



smoke, an' I jus' put out. Son," — his heavy hand was on Jenifer's shoulder, — "what did you go for?"

Jenifer gazed back astounded. After that stern sentence one thing only was possible. So straight had been his purpose that Jenifer thought that the old man must know.

But he had not; and Wooten was worn. The wild excitement of his fiery preaching had spent his strength, as always. The lines of his face were drawn, as Jenifer's had been. But Jenifer showed now, beyond his perplexity, a certain high steadfastness the old man had never seen.

Wooten's hand fell from Jenifer's shoulder to the table by which he stood. He clutched it, and steadied himself by it. Jenifer's shoulders were straight, his head high, touching the sapling rafters; and in his eyes was a quick and unexpected sparkle of amusement.

"Well?" demanded the old man.

Jenifer's smile answered him.

"Was it that — was it *that* you went to do? God, an' I was afeared!"

## XXV

WOOTEN was anxious yet! Jenifer came and went for a day or two, for a week. His old silences held him. He made no excuses at Briar Park, and he kept clear of the house. He found a new way to the trail; and the yard, the apple-trees, the porch, and those who might be found there were beyond his ken.

It was characteristic of Jenifer to leave doubt, or the thing he hated, or that which brought him hourly difficulty behind him. This the world might have and that; and out of what was left he would carve content; but he had come now where his scorn of perplexities would not serve. They must be mastered.

The battle with his love Jenifer had put aside. That was something held yet apart, the reckoning with which was in the future; but beyond that he was filled with doubts, sometimes with longings.

When the dawn was on the peaks, and Lightfoot picked dainty way along the dewy trail, her rider saw, instead of the way which dipped between heights of green, the rosy light that stole between the hills and swept the mists flying down the valleys. When he climbed again, with Wooten, perhaps, trudging by his side, he heard, instead of the old man's drawling talk of the Hollow, Wheatham's broken monologues. The

Old Place drew him, and beyond it loomed another question he had not touched, — Alice.

Alice herself had at first been distinctly and exuberantly glad of her freedom. Leisure, money, the sounds and sights of the street, and the careless attentions of the men she knew sufficed. Jenifer had gauged her well. Grame was forgotten; Jenifer was feared the more, because he made no sign.

When the gilt began to wear from her life she was scarcely aware of its dulling. Men who were at first friendly grew tired of anomalous attentions to one who held no charm to attract them long. The younger sister, now grown, was resentful of one who had leisure, who was better gowned, and who claimed a share in visitors and pleasures the younger thought meant for herself alone. The mother, used to sending her children forth and having the long day for herself, found it irksome to have another in the house who fretted through the hours and was never quite at ease. And Alice's money, which had seemed at first so big a sum, grew small when she found the interest of it was but an income for moderate living.

The walls of her mother's house were narrow, the rooms dingy, the windows were slits upon the street; and Alice had known the hills. She had hated them; but she remembered.

She had not forgotten that the house which crowned them was hers, what was left of it; the house, the quarters, and "what they held." She was ready to flare it at her mother when necessary.

A trifle precipitated a quarrel. Alice came sparkling

down the narrow stair when she knew a caller was in the small parlor. Her mother intercepted her. "Alice!" she called.

The daughter swept into the room, and waited impatiently.

"That man down stairs came to see Eugenia." The mother looked Alice squarely in the eyes.

"What if he did?"

"You stay here, and give her a chance. You are forever in the way and —"

"I!" Alice's fair face was as red as the knot of ribbon she had fastened in her hair. "I!"

"Yes, you. You seem to think that every man who shows his face here wants to see you? You've had your day," brutally.

"It's a — a —" She would have flung out the vulgar word, but anger choked her.

"What's the matter?" asked Eugenia coldly. They had not heard the front door close, nor the sister coming up the stair.

"Where's George?" the mother demanded quickly.

"Gone."

"Why?"

"He only came to see if I could go to the theatre to-morrow night. What are you all dressed up for, Alice?"

"She was coming down to see him." The mother's anger flamed up. "I told her to leave you alone."

"I wish to goodness she would."

"You do? You do? I'll leave you alone — for good — forever. I've got a home. I'm going to it."

"I wish you would!" The mother's tone was more devout than the sister's had been.

"And I'll never set foot here again, never."

"Won't anybody cry," vowed Eugenia.

"You'll never have a chance to speak to me so again, I tell you. You —"

Alice raced up to her dingy room, tore off her clothes, tumbled her gaudy dresses from drawer and press, and before she had drawn breath from her anger, or knew what she did, she sat furious and straight on the cushioned seat of a car which sped westward.

She had telegraphed for a carriage to meet her; and the only thing she knew of the Old Place was that Jenifer was not there.

Ben met her. His first eager question was for "Marse Jen'fah;" but Alice shook her head, and did not open her lips to mention his name; and the negro, after the first babbling of excitement, kept a pursed-up mouth. But for her "Marse Jen'fah" would be where Ben longed to see him; and all the way the negro's back was straight, his gaze on the horses and the road. He scarcely turned his head at Alice's sharp exclamation when they sped around the curve, beneath the trees, and in at the gate.

The lilacs were dusty, the locusts filled with pods, the grass purpling, a late rose abloom, and the house was as it looked the day she had first seen it, — roofed, its chimneys tall and square, the windows opened, the doors swinging wide. And Wheatham, slender, thin, and worn — the months of waiting had been hard — stood on the stile.

Alice carried it off bravely. She had come home for a while. The wagons must be sent for her trunks. Was everything moving aright. Were there enough servants for the house? Must any orders be given?

She pretended to feel no surprise at the rebuilt house or refurnished rooms, — she had expected to shelter herself in one of the quarters, — and she asked no questions, nor did Wheatham deign to make explanations.

Instead of blackened roof and shattered windows and ruined house the sunlight fell on the brick floor of the porch, the wind blew through the hall, the floors gleamed as she passed, the red mahogany shone darkly against the wall, and the polished stair creaked beneath her tread. It stung her with horror. By night, with no light outside but far white stars and that flaring crown at which she would not look — she saw Jenifer's stern face and sombre eyes above the spiral stair, — by night, she could have shrieked for fear.

Wheatham had been only courteous. He had lived for two things during those months which had left a touch of gravity upon his dreamy humor; and these were his work, now famous, and the rebuilding of the house as he had first seen it standing amidst the snows, strong and staunch, tradition and history behind it and demanding of the future happiness and full life. He would see no such vandal ruin as it had shown nor allow any such waste of all that should be treasured. He knew that Jenifer would return. He grew to look for him any day; and he had pushed the work madly to have it finished before that hour.

Alice had come, but Wheatham left her to herself.

In the big and still and empty house the woman met her past at every step. The hedges hinted of it; the locusts whispered it; the winds bemoaned it.

After a sleepless night in which she had listened to the loud breathing of a maid in the small room which matched the bridal-chamber, dawn stole through the mountains. Light stands for hope, for delight and gladsomeness, and the woman watching it had never so joyfully hailed it, nor known so deep a moment. Some measuring of herself, some lifting of her soul must have moved her: the stile and its memories that morning were not hateful; nor was she afraid of the place of graves.

Something in the air intensified her mood, a languor of heat and pulselessness of currents. Thunder-heads rolled in the zenith, and the sun was scorching. Alice, coming slowly in from the porch, looked back at the shining clouds, at the dark roll of one that hung straight overhead, at the tall gray poles, and the dazzling line which spun from the old place out to all the surging world. For whom cared she there? For whom had she a word?

The bell rang in the hall as she pondered and she moved languidly to answer it.

"Hello!" she called carelessly.

"Yes! Oh, God! Yes. What?" It was Jenifer's voice. He had come at last to the step toward which every thought had been leading, and from a distant point had called up "home."

Alice heard his voice, his exclamation; caught the



sharp rebound of feeling in his voice. "It is I," she cried, her voice stifled, her breath choked. "I! I have come home." She leaned panting against the wall, the tube still at her ear, and over the wire awful silence. But that cloud which sailed the zenith had blackened. Its folds were like midnight, its edges purpled; and from it came suddenly one roll that shook the hills, the house and quarters; one flash — along the wire.

Clanging, the receiver was pulled down with her. The body settled along the wall. Wheatham, Ben, the servants rushing into the hall saw a straight, white-gowned figure prone on the polished floor. The hand still grasped the tube; the face was calm; and on the temple against which the rubber had been held was a blackened mark.

The wild clamor of it had carried across the hills to a far high peak. "God!" cried Jenifer as he rushed from the little station. "The train! Flag it! I must catch it. Here it comes."

"See to my horse," he shouted from the platform.

Enter the coach and sit down, he could not. It swayed and rocked down the mountainside. At the point nearest his home he swung himself off, found a horse somewhere, raced on and on along the rough road. Yet the day was late, and the dead long dead, when he stood beside her.

## XXVI

LIFE at The Barracks had been long unheeded by its neighbors. Wheatham had been anxious only for his privacy, Jenifer, while master, content with his solitude and Alice was scornful. It was current in the county that the owners of the Old Place were again abroad. The artist, who knew that Jenifer would return with deeper insight and with calmer judgment to lead to wiser deeds, kept his own counsels, and Ben held a still tongue.

But the news of the tragedy flashed from house to house. Carriages to which the lane had been long unknown turned in. The preacher, the politician, their neighbors, and Mrs. Moran herself followed the solemn train along the garden path, and in through the iron gates; nor had Mrs. Moran a bitter thought because a stranger lay there by those she loved.

Her eyes were wet as the gate of the garden closed at last behind them. The preacher had slipped from his place amongst the slow-moving men and women, who wound by the pillared porch and across the stile to the carriages which waited beneath the locusts; and Mrs. Moran caught him by the arm.

"You are not going yet?" she whispered.

"Not yet."

"I must see him." Mrs. Moran spoke forcibly, if low. "Who has seen him? Not a soul but those in the house and you. Not a word of kindness to him. No, I am going to stay. I will not let him feel as if no one cared whether — whether —" She bit her lip, and turned quickly away. "It may be — I am afraid — Oh, perhaps I have made a mistake. It has been wrong, the whole wretched thing — what I — what all of us have done. We have held aloof, but now —" She turned towards the porch.

The preacher was by her side and his kindly gaze was on her face.

"It is hard sometimes to know what is best to be done," said Mrs. Moran brokenly. "But there has been trouble here, hard trouble, and we might have helped. Oh, don't say a word. I blame myself enough. And he" — with sudden flash of admiration — "what do you think he has been doing? Farming Briar Park!"

"Briar Park?" They had reached the porch. Mrs. Moran's team waited in the lane; and the wheels and tops of the last carriages glittered beyond the orchard.

"Ambler Arronton, you know. She used to be here often when she was — oh, a baby. You remember her?" Mrs. Moran spoke nervously and quickly. "No, it was before you came to the county. They were kin to the people here, close kin. — He is in the library," coming close and whispering earnestly. "Ask Mr. Jenifer if he will not speak to me; I'll wait for him here."

"Mr. Jenifer," Mrs. Moran turned at the sound of

his step. She held out both hands impulsively. "We are so distressed — so grieved for — for you — your sorrow. You will believe it. You must know —" She broke off suddenly. Beneath Jenifer's still face lay such tense suffering. If she, a stranger, had blamed herself for lack of neighborliness, for what had Jenifer berated himself?

"You must know our sympathy," she assured him breathlessly. "You will let us show it. You will stay on now, here, at home?" she asked abruptly, and then as if she feared what the answer might be, "We shall not again lose you?"

There was a second of intense silence. The preacher leaned against the door, smiling softly to himself, as he remembered a sunny noon, the trees by the church door, and his plea. Wheatham, at the library window, where he had heard, stood still and grave. Ben, in the hall, was wide-mouthed.

"You will stay?" Mrs. Moran repeated.

"I think so," said Jenifer simply. He saw her warm flush of friendliness, but she did not hear Wheatham's long breath, nor see Ben's twisted, hidden face.

"I must go now," Mrs. Moran said quickly. "I stayed because I couldn't leave without seeing you. Some day we are coming again."

From the carriage she leaned to say: "Mr. Jenifer, I used to love this old place more than any in the world, excepting my own home. It hurt me to see it change hands. I believe you love it too," she exclaimed impulsively. "I know what you have done for it. I want to see more done and see you do it."

"Ah," said the preacher gently, when they were far down the lane, "we can neglect no tie of neighborliness without hurting ourselves."

Whereat the lady flashed a glance which silenced him. In his unworldly way the preacher was yet shrewd. He knew how swiftly Mrs. Moran's plastic mind would shape her account of those she had left; and how her skilful tongue would repeat the story about which Jenifer held no reticence, and which, in the excitement, was abroad; how each fault would be condoned and every good extolled, all to The Barracks' gain.

He left to her the doing of it. He himself saw continually the face of the man they had left standing by the stile. More was written there than sorrow for a woman whose life had never matched his own, more than horror or remorse; something higher and stronger to which the man must reverently be left.

Those of Jenifer's household saw it, also. The negro, with that instinct with which his race is seldom credited, but which many of them often possess, went sadly about his work. He would have liked to keep close to "Marse Jen'fah" every moment. Wheatham divined, and cursed for the moment, the talent which was of his fingers, and not of his tongue. Such talk as he could think of was purely material.

"You see what I have done," he said, when days had passed since that slow procession had wound down the paths. "Your letter — the one you left — gave me absolute charge. The income of the place was at my disposal and it has doubled. It is a fortune in itself,

with the impetus you have given it — Jenifer, possessions are a responsibility. It has been said before, perhaps; since the day when the stewards were called to give account, and before that ” — this was one of Wheatham’s rare references to Biblical text, and he made it now grimly. “ As long as this place is in your hands you owe it your best. I could not see it as you left it,” he went on rapidly and without a tone of accusation. “ I knew some day you would come, and in a week I had the men at work. In three months it was finished, just as it was when — Jenifer.” Wheatham broke off. He saw for a moment the summer’s night, the blossoming lilacs, the dusky shadows, and Jenifer’s blithe young face; and felt for a second the rapture of that living whose reflex had warmed his own stiller nature.

“ I knew you would come back. I vowed you should find it as it had been.”

Jenifer’s face was covered with his hand. He groped with the other across the table where Wheatham’s lay, and grasped it.

“ And I wish to say right now,” in an attempt at levity which the catch in his voice belied, “ that I make you no offer to vacate, as I did before. I am here for keeps.”

“ Always, Tom; forever; as long as a foot of it is mine, and that will be as long as I live,” Jenifer added with grave assurance.

“ Please God ! ” said the artist lightly, as he got up, and crossed the room. “ Though I’ll have to be off sometimes. There are some sketches of the sea I must

make. I have forgotten how it looks. But these mountains —" He was standing by the window gazing out.

Jenifer turned to look at him. "Forget them if you can." His voice as he spoke was easier, and his eyes less sombre.

"I can't. I admit it. The shackles are here." Wheatham held out his crossed wrists with an air of mock gravity.

"Here!" Jenifer touched his breast lightly above his heart.

"True." Wheatham's manner won to his old careless drollery. "I own it," he declared, as he came back to his chair by the empty hearth.

Jenifer turned in his seat and thrust his hands into his pockets. His long limbs were straight before him and his face was sober and thoughtful. So, Wheatham had often watched him.

Jenifer had been to the artist something like the faces which formed beneath his fingers, — first a blur, then a line, a suggestion, and last a clearing and strengthening till breath of life was there. The artist had seen the man grow, and now his face was past the whimsical reading.

An east wind was beating up and threshing the trees about the house. Wheatham shrugged his shoulders at the sound. "Lord," he exclaimed, "how it howls about this place!"

"But the peaks," began Jenifer dreamily, "there you are in the midst of it. Sometimes —" Jenifer pulled himself up. He had been about to tell Wheatham



of The Voice, and he could not speak of it. Instead —  
“You must come up to the Hollow.”

“You are not going back?”

“For a while.”

“For what?”

“To finish the work I began there,” replied Jenifer quietly.

“That’s foolishness; clear foolishness.”

“No. Tom,” he said with rapid emphasis, “I’ve thought it out — what I must do. The money I placed for Alice, I shall transfer to her people and get back the deeds to this place. They’ll be glad enough. I — I have already communicated with them,” he admitted stammeringly. “You know none would come up when they heard. I’ve had to write and telephone, you know. and that is settled. But I must go back to The Park for awhile. There are only women there, and no one could carry the work ahead. They are dependent on me.” He spoke at long intervals, but clearly and succinctly. “And when I have finished there,” he added with a sudden smile, “I’m coming back for good; then — well, hard work, I suppose.”

“Haven’t been doing anything lately?”

“Nothing to hurt.”

“Hm! That looks it,” with meaning glance at the hand Jenifer had drawn from his pocket.

Jenifer flushed as he thrust it back again. “I never could be satisfied doing nothing.”

“No?” with teasing inflection. It was past the hour when Wheatham was usually abed. He got slowly to his feet.

"Wait a minute, Wheatham. Sit down. You know why — why I went away. I have nothing to say about that night, that evening, nothing. You know! I had thought — I was afraid — It is too late now, — and that night when I went away I could have killed him; her, too. It was the only thing I dared trust to, — distance and time to see things straight. I have had it.

"And she — she is dead. There is no reckoning with that question, as I was coming back to do, when — when I called you, I thought. God! I cannot think of it. She — she must have been sorry; she must have! — Wheatham, what brought her back that day, that very day?" Jenifer was on his feet, striding up and down the room, talking brokenly. "Yes, I know it is useless to think of it now," he rejoined to Wheatham's protest, "or to judge. Useless!"

The ring of his step and the howl of the wind echoed through and about the house, while Wheatham stood dumb and helpless.

"When I go back — yes, I must; but I shall be back and forth, getting hold of things here and seeing to work there. It can easily be done."

"Put some one in your place," urged Wheatham.

"No, *she* —" unconscious that the emphasis brought a sudden illuminating flash in Wheatham's eyes, "she will be married in the fall." Wheatham turned away. "Then they can do as they please. I shall have finished."

Wheatham moved awkwardly. He would have given anything to know what to say: and he could not think of a word, except, "It's getting late."

"Going now?" asked Jenifer absently.

"Yes. Want me to stay in the house to-night?" Wheatham urged eagerly.

"No; no."

"Jenifer, I am going to stay right here," he declared suddenly. "Lord, man, you look as if your eyes were open for the night, and with this wind! It's going to rain by morning."

But Wheatham, through his watchful wakefulness of that night, vowed that the air of tragedy lingered too deep and that the next day's light should find him avoiding its shadow.

Ben unconsciously aided him.

The morning was misty and the sting of rain was in the fitful currents; by noon it poured upon the porch, and ran along the roof, and hissed upon the logs Ben lighted in the hearth.

The negro had been delighted with the chance to linger near Jenifer. He pretended great solicitude for the fire.

"Dis hyar fiah won't buhn nohow," he said, as he stood on the hearth and watched the slow flames. "Ain't been lighted hyar fer so long dat dat chimbly done choked up wid damp. An' de house it sho is been lookin' lonesome. Marse Jen'fah," with quick look out of the tail of his eye at Jenifer sitting in the deep window, "Marse Wheatham say you gwine stay home now, leas' ways after awhile. I sho is glad. I been nigh 'pon cuttin' an' runnin' myself befo' dis. I'd 'a' gone," he boasted — Ben would never have left without Jenifer's word — "hadn't been fer Lady Blue. You heard 'bout her?"

Jenifer turned his head quickly, his interest at once awakened. "No. What was it?"

"Ain't you done heard? De-laws-a-mussy! Why, she took it; she did so; dat blue ribbon! Lawd, ain't I done rode her at de show, same as you said? Ain't dat ribbon a-wavin' from her stall? Come 'long, Marse Jen'fah, out to de stables, you ain't done sot foot in 'em. I wants you to see. Is you comin'?"

"Sure." Jenifer sprang up, picked up a cap from the table in the hall, and strode across the red paths, the rain beating on him and on Ben's shining face.

"Jes look at her," cried Ben, as Jenifer ran his hand down the horse's satiny flank, his keen eye noting every point. "Ain't she a beauty?"

"She is that," declared Jenifer, with a sudden spark of enthusiasm.

"An' dyar's mo' like her comin' on. But I wants to tell you 'bout her, 'bout dat ribbon. I rid her myse'f," grinning with delight, "'deed I did. I had to do some tall ol' trainin' to git down to de mark. I starve myself twell I wa'n't nothin' but skin an' bones, but I'd rid her in dem, jes in de bones, to 'a' seed dat day. De carriages, an' de ladies in 'em — Em! an' de stan' same like a swarm of butterflies. An' Lady Blue a-prancin' 'roun', an' me — I wo' de blue, too. You didn't say nothin' 'bout de colors an' I thought dat would do. Dat's de Barracks' colors, I done sot 'em; blue wid a tetch o' red.

"An de men a-sayin' 'Whose hoss dat?' An I was jes as up'ty. 'Tis Marse Jen'fah's hoss Lady

Blue,' says I; an' I gin her pedigree slick. I was ready for 'em.

"An dey say 'Fus' entry from de Barracks,' an' look sort o' sober lak." Ben saw Jenifer's wince. "'Case dey don't know what she gwine do, you see; didn't know nothin' 'bout de hosses on dis place. I guess dey knows now," unctuously.

"I jes bet ebry las' cent I had on her, on me an' Lady Blue. Marse Wheatham put it up fer me; an' we made a heap o' money dat day, we an' Marse Tom did. Den las' fall we carried a string of colts off to New York, an' sol' 'em ebry one; dat we did. Tell you what, Marse Jen'fah, dis place it beats creation. Don't you nebbah leab it no mo'. Dis fall I 'spec' you'll go 'long wid de hosses, too," with sudden slyness. "Yes, you will. Dyar's one Ise trainin' now dat beats de bunch. Jump! Marse Jen'fah, I tell you de truth, dat colt could jump de moon, an' gib de ol' cow p'int on how to do it."

Ben was so pleased at his wit and at Jenifer's laugh, which rang to the rafters, that he had not a word more to say.

## XXVII

"SON, you certainly can make good coffee," Wooten vowed. "Gimme another cup." A fire crackled in the small stove in the lean-to. The coffee-pot on the hearth was close by Jenifer's elbow. "An' these biscuits! Ain't nobody can cook like Mary."

"I'm goin' huntin' to-day," he said after a long pause, "and if thar's any squirrels — Well, barbecued for me. What do you say?"

"There's nobody to fix them."

"What's the matter?" in sudden surprise. "Whar's Mary?"

"Sick."

"You don't say. I saw her yestiddy."

"She has just been keeping up."

"Lan' I" The old man leaned his elbow on the table and looked out through the narrow window along the path beneath the willows. Yellow leaves blew along it, and drifted across the lush grass and about the door. Copper and gold, oak and chestnut leaves sifted slowly down the mountainside. A faint feather of smoke curled above the chimney beyond the thicket. "You don't say so," he repeated helplessly.

Jenifer shot a keen glance at the old man before he spoke. "She has too much to do."

"That's so."

"The girl has been sick all summer —"

"I know."

"And now the boy has hurt his foot —"

"Sam hurt! How?"

"Cutting wood, up on the mountain."

Jenifer, as he ate his meal, watched Wooten keenly across the small table.

"Wonder if she would like me to do anything for her?" asked Wooten slowly.

"You might try."

Wooten ran his sinewy hand from his neck up through his hair, standing it straight upon his head. "She done run me away once."

"Well?" Jenifer was smoothing the honey upon his biscuit. He dared not look up.

"I tol' her she was shut o' me for good. I never was goin' to come back."

"Who said anything about your going back to her? She wouldn't have you if you did."

"No."

"And you couldn't if she were willing."

"What's to hinder?" sharply.

Jenifer did not answer. He knew he must soon leave the Hollow, and he could not bear the thought of leaving Wooten alone in that far cabin. He was aware of the old man's soft heart, but there was something fiery about the preacher, and it was not easy to hedge in talking of his affairs.

"Those other women — you think they stand in the way?"



Jenifer's lids were lowered; his lips still and firm.

"Shucks! They don't count at all."

There was the slightest quiver about Jenifer's mouth, and his face was again sober.

"They! I jus' took up with them; an' I did the very bes' fer 'em I could, long as we 'greed together. But Mary—I 'member to-day the time we was married."

"You were married to her?" The old man did not see the quick gleam in Jenifer's eyes. He did not even notice the question.

"We walked down the mountain an' clean across to Hillsboro. An' the birds were singing all along the way back, an' the flowers a-bloomin'. When she got cantankerous —"

"When you began to behave as you did."

"What's that?"

"You told me." Jenifer leaned his elbows on the table and looked squarely across at the old man. "You said she couldn't stand you."

"You needn't be flinging it up at me," Wooten growled.

"You needn't hold it against her. You deserved it."

"What's that?" Wooten sprang to his feet.

"It's the truth. You know it. You needn't blame her for it," Jenifer answered calmly.

"So I don't; so I don't. I never did. But I was 'bleeged to have somebody. Mary knew it."

Jenifer passed his hand quickly across his face hiding his smile. There was too much at stake to show amusement at the old man's speech; and Jenifer was careful.

"You might see if she wants anything," he began

slowly. "I met her yesterday coming down the mountain with her arms filled with wood. She was so weak she could hardly carry it a step." Jenifer did not tell that he had taken it from her, carried it to her door, and had added enough to it to last her cabin a week.

"I mought venture to the do'," admitted the old man. Then with sudden change of topic: "Come 'long, son; it's gettin' late. You ain't so pyeart 'bout yo' work as you used to be."

"Not much to do," declared Jenifer quickly.

"That's so; it's gettin' 'long late in the fall. An' then—" but he cut his foreboding short, and, with head held high and a firm step he tramped down the Hollow by Jenifer's side.

Jenifer, with his hand on Lightfoot's rippling mane, was grave and silent. He had said all he dared and he would not spoil with careless talk the thought he wished to leave in the old man's mind. The early light was red across the hills as the winding way disclosed them, then shut them out; up to the clear sky ran copper and gold and red; about the rocks were crimson vines; Jerusalem apples were mellowing in the sered grasses; and the drifting and sifting and blowing of leaves mingled softly with the rushing of the stream.

The trail widened. The peaks swept back. "Son," cried Wooten suddenly, "what am I going to do—Lord, what am I going to do here this winter, by myself?"

"Better go home with me," urged Jenifer quickly and warmly.

“Go home with you, to that great place they tell me you’ve got — Not that that makes any difference,” seeing Jenifer’s deep flush, “but how could I go, go ’way from here? What would I do anywhar else?” The old man threw back his head, and his fiery gaze was from purple peak to purple peak that rimmed the Hollow. “Good lan’! mought as well try to pull a squirrel out o’ his wintah hol’ as me out o’ this. No, sah; here I was born, an’ here I b’long. I’d be no good ’tall nowhar else. But son, —” as Jenifer stood silent, his arm on Lightfoot’s neck, “’tis time you was goin’. I don’t mean for good, ’way from here; I know that time’s boun’ to come. I done tol’ you long ago. But I will —”

Jenifer could stand the old man’s misery no longer. He thought he knew the way it should be alleviated, but the means were not in his hands, and he had said all that he dared. He sprang on Lightfoot’s back. “Good-by,” he called.

Jenifer had been back in the Hollow for a month. He had taken up the threads of his work grimly and he had added to his memories of Briar Park one he would gladly have forgotten: —

It was the day after his return. Jenifer was at work in the stable yard, watching the big wagon being loaded with sacks of wheat. The sun blazed on the yard. Thin clouds trailed across the peaks. The barn shut out the sight of hill and road; and Lightfoot’s stall was empty. Ambler had ridden her out to the store.

Suddenly, as the wagon pulled out the gate, he heard the race of Lightfoot’s run in the lane; and Ambler

sprang from the saddle at the gate, and walked straight across to him. Her head was high, her red mouth firm, and her eyes bright with anger.

"Mr. Jenifer," Jenifer started at the name, "I would like to see you a moment when you have time."

"I have nothing to do now," answered Jenifer calmly.

Ambler gave one impatient glance about the yard: Joshua was at work there, and the old negro's curiosity was unbounded. "Perhaps it would be better —" she began.

"I will go up to the house with you."

Jenifer opened the big gate gravely, and kept pace with her hasty steps. His quick look showed him Ambler's flushed cheek and sparkling eyes. The wind had tossed the loose tendrils of her hair about her cap. Her dark skirt, gathered carelessly high on one side and flung across her arm, trailed the red dust on the other side. Her nervous fingers bent the switch she carried till it snapped, and she flung it angrily away.

"Perhaps we had best go this way," she said haughtily, striking into the path that bordered the wing and led to the side of the old garden. "It is cool here." Ambler knew that Miss Molly was sound asleep and the place secluded.

She looked up steadily. "I wish to tell you, Mr. Jenifer, that I am ready to release you from your contract."

The use of his name had told Jenifer that she knew and her tone told what she thought. "It takes two to make a contract, Miss Ambler," he said coldly.

"You mean —"

"It must be broken by consent of both."

"Well, I am ready."

"I am not."

"I don't see why — Oh, why didn't you tell us? To come back from all that awful — awful sorrow, and to say not a word," she clasped her hands impulsively. "You know our sympathy," she cried brokenly, "mine and Aunt Molly's when she — when she hears?"

In her excitement Ambler scarcely heard Jenifer's stifled words. "There is no reason why you should have come back at all. We could have managed. It was dreadful to think you had to do it. And — and we thank you for all you have done this year. But there is no reason for your staying longer."

"I shall be gone soon enough."

"Your contract holds for three months longer. I shall not keep you to it for a day. We do not want the owner of The Barracks to farm our little place."

"Have I done it so badly?" asked Jenifer gently.

"You know what you have done. You know how you found it, and how it is now. And," with sudden heat, "you know why you did it. But it was not fair to leave us to think —" Ambler turned away. It hurt, that imposition, and blinded her. When she thought of that, she was furious, but when she thought of Jenifer, as the letter she had that morning received spoke of him, she was heart-broken with sympathy.

It had been in Briar Park's mail, a strange hand, addressed to her; and it had said: "My dear, of course I know you and you know me, — and if you have forgotten Miss Molly can enlighten you, — though I

have not seen you since you were a little thing playing about The Barracks. You knew it was sold. Maybe you heard who bought it. But, child, the man who owns it disappeared more than a year ago, I'll tell you why further on, and where do you think he has been? — right there at Briar Park."

It could not have been put in a way to hurt Ambler worse. The road had blackened before her when she read and the reins fell on Lightfoot's neck. The girl crumpled the sheets so fiercely that her shaking fingers must smooth and resmooth them before she could finish reading the letter. That it lauded Jenifer, praised every deed, awoke for him every sympathy made it but harder. The letter ended with the privilege, generations old, of claiming the family's friendship and was signed "Anna Moran."

No speed of Lightfoot's had been swift enough to carry Ambler home.

"I know the place — The Barracks —" she began again and brokenly. The look of Ambler's face with its uncertainty, its sorrow, and vexation was so childish — Jenifer's lips were firm and his hands clenched in the loose pockets of his coat.

"Our other tenant was not so particular," she avowed, clutching at another line of thought.

"A reason why I should hold the faster to my bond." Jenifer smiled faintly.

"There is no bond, Mr. Jenifer." Ambler spoke soberly and with more self-control. "I annul it. You see—" with the manner of one ready to argue out a matter, "I have followed closely what you have done.

Much of it was what I would have liked to try myself. I know how to go ahead and I always wanted to control the farm," she added wilfully.

"You couldn't do it," declared Jenifer sententiously.

"I could," with a determined tilt of her dimpled chin.

Jenifer smiled at the gesture of defiance.

"I am going to try anyhow," a smile hovered about the red mouth, "until — until —"

"Until when?" hoarsely.

Ambler stood rigid. Her eyes were tense. She moved as if to speak, then restrained her words. "Perhaps it might be best to look out for some one for next year," she at last added.

"It might," said Jenifer bitterly. "There will be no one in the house, I suppose."

"The land will be here." The sudden red swept Ambler's face as she ran up the steps.



## XXVIII

JENIFER was not aware that, as the days wore on, Aunt Molly transferred him to the pedestal from which Ambler had tumbled. She must have a hero or heroine upon it, for her incense of romance; and Ambler had bitterly disappointed her.

Aunt Molly remembered the night the girl's unrest began, the night when Jenifer had questioned Ambler under the laden apple-boughs. She knew the day not long after when the young man on whom she and Joshua were building rode angrily away. She could trace the quarrel, but find no cause; nor could she say a word to Ambler. The summer had opened the way to a life Aunt Molly had sighed for; and found distinctly trying. There was company in the house, there were visits abroad, house parties and fox-hunts, and Ambler feverishly pursuing all. Aunt Molly, in her wake, would at any hour have given up the round for Briar Park and the shadowed porch and the low rocker and the well-worn book. But with those she had sighed for this; and her own hand had opened the way which Ambler trod too gaily.

Joshua, left at home, grew glum. He had closed the gate after that furious young man who rode down the road with never a backward glance. He had seen "Miss Amblah" cross the yard with chin in air; and

he could have foretold what would follow, all but Ambler's sudden popularity, and her pursuit of it.

He had been distracted by the girl before, but this anxiety cut deeper; it was too keen to be borne alone.

"Miss Molly," he ventured, when he saw her one day alone in the yard, strolling peacefully under the trees, her dress ankle-high in front and trailing far behind, "Miss Molly —" in a tone of fear and misery, "does you think it runs in famblies that — that ol' maids might ebbah git 'tagious lak?"

"Old maids!" Miss Molly repeated. "Old maids! What do I know of them? There was never one in our family," she vowed; and then turned hot from head to foot, remembering her own spinster condition.

. . . . .  
The tension grew greater at Briar Park, and Jenifer's natural impatience waxed with it. He was beset by his temptation to cut hard things short and leave them behind. The days dragged, yet something beyond his determination held him.

With every shortening day he expected to hear the notice of Ambler's marriage; still there was no hint of it. And every day Jenifer found Wooten somewhere along the trail. The old man seemed to be counting the days, and missing none of them. Jenifer had grown so sure of him that when one late evening, — the stars above the peaks and the frost gathering on the withered grass, — he missed him all along the way and found his own cabin empty and fireless, he climbed to the far hut as soon as Lightfoot's bridle had been loosed.

The door of the hut was shut. Jenifer's eyes, close

against the small window, saw only darkness. His restless steps gained him no knowledge; but when he again approached his own cabin a square of light blazed out across the clearing. The old man was waiting by the hearth.

"Lan', I was wonderin' whar you were," Wooten began sheepishly. "I been so busy all day 'twan't no time lef' to come down to meet you. Been fixin' things," quickly, "an' movin' a few." The old man laughed awkwardly; but Jenifer would not help him out. He stood on the rough hearth, towering far above the mantel-shelf, his eyes dark with delight.

Wooten wriggled in the hickory chair. "Well," he declared, grinning broadly, "Mary, she done took me back."

"Yes," after he'd laughed and talked and boasted, and taken out his pipe and sent a whiff of smoke up to the rafters, "I done tol' her I'd never have lef' her myself. She sont me away. An' it did me good. Leas'-ways, I s'pose so. I ain't never tetched a drop since, none to hurt, you know. I ain't countin' a little now an' then. An' I have lifted my voice against it on the mountain an' showed to others the error of their ways" — a sudden touch of his preacher exaltation and a tone of its high singsong in his voice — "an' I've kep' myself straight. I ain't been so tarnation lazy as I was. I worked for — for 'em both, long as I had 'em; an' no man could do mo'. But it certainly does feel good to be home again, down thar." He stretched his feet out contentedly. "That Sam! he's jus' as sassy! I always did have a likin' for him."

But with all the old man's ramblings he never told how he and Mary made up, what he had said or she replied, or on what basis he had concluded that she still belonged to him and had persuaded her to that faith. That was of the mountain, where they had that morning met, she with her arms piled high with rotted branches, he with his gun in the hollow of his arm.

When Mary had looked at him with her brown eyes, "Jus' like a deer, when it's a-peepin' through the leaves," and her soft, wrinkled cheek had paled, Wooten had spoken and Mary listened. The old man had taken up his abode in the cabin which he had first built.

"She'll never get shet o' me no mo'," he vowed, and kept his word. "Ain't nothin' like your own home," he added, "an' somebody you wants in it, somebody you wants *bad*." Wooten threw back his head to give Jenifer a searching look, but the young man had so utterly forgotten himself and listened to the rhapsody with such delight, that the hint was lost.

Jenifer had not been able to bear the thought that the old man should be left, as Jenifer feared he might be, to his childish loneliness. Now he would not be alone, and Jenifer felt his ties to the Hollow loosen.

His work at Briar Park was less binding — "the res' time o' the year" — and he was oftener far across the hills at The Barracks. His masterful hands regrasped every detail of that life. He was in touch again with every neglected point of business, and he forged to a place amongst his fellows he had never thought of nor expected.

What the neighbors had themselves seen of Jenifer, what they had heard, and this last capstone, the completion of what he had undertaken at Briar Park, touched the fancy of a romance loving people. The preacher watched the wave of sympathy with warm heart: the politician turned it to his own account.

It so happened that a certain office in the district was vacant. Two men, both of the dominant party, sought it. The politician wanted neither. His word, also, would decide it; and he wished for no such enemy as the rejected man would make. He was thinking of it, desperate of the solution, when he rode, one winter's day, by the lane which wound from The Barracks. Riding down it came Jenifer with Wooten by his side. Jenifer had persuaded the old man off with him.

The politician drew rein, and the three rode abreast down the hard red road.

"How are things up your way?" the politician asked of Wooten. "Going to turn out a pretty good vote this election?"

"Every las' man," answered Wooten carelessly.

The politician was silent as they rode down the hill and up. "Who are you going to vote for?" he asked abruptly when they turned the top of the next.

Wooten's laugh was shrewd, and the politician knew what it meant. He must first show his own hand, and it suited him neither to show two aces of the same suit nor an empty palm. "Hm!" was all he said. The clear stinging air and hard road and beat of the horse's hoofs were enough without speech, which came at long intervals.

The politician gave up the puzzle. "Coming home soon?" he turned to ask Jenifer.

Lightfoot shied foolishly at some object in the road, and Jenifer nodded an answer; but his lithe figure, his voice as he stroked his horse's neck and soothed her, his air of strength and alertness, caught the politician's eye, as it had done before; and he glanced from him to Wooten. The old man's gaze was adoring.

"Gad!" cried the politician to himself, though he laughed aloud, "there's the man!" With Wooten, and behind him the mountain folk who were linked to Jenifer by his service, with the county still afire with his tale, to mass dramatically the vote on Jenifer would be easy; and the politician knew that the man was capable of the duty.

The thing was that day hatched. If the politician ruled the hills, Wooten ruled the peaks; it was only necessary to gain Jenifer's consent.

"The people of The Barracks, sir, are not used to being idle in public affairs." — Did not Jenifer know it? Had not the knowledge cut deep? — "They are accustomed to being not only active, but leaders, sir, leaders!" The politician pulled himself up. He lauded his office too highly. "This is a small opportunity, but it is a beginning, and" — his voice kindling — "we shall expect great things of you."

The politician knew — and Jenifer no less — that the great things Jenifer might do would be material and not visionary; that the future opened to him was of broad and helpful citizenship and that his work would be

executive, and not exclamatory. It suited the politician the better.

“Fact is we need such men as you, men with practical knowledge and experience —”

The flattery rolled unheeded. Jenifer was thinking of that first sentence. He knew well the part the men of The Barracks had played. He was coming back to the Old Place with deeper insight, wider purpose, and more humility, not with careless self-satisfaction. He already felt the ripple of feeling that ran out to him. He bent his head in thought as he rode while the others eagerly beat out the matter, and planned it joyously between them. Jenifer's thoughts drifted far away.

Two days before he had met Ambler on a path of the farm. She had come to passing him with few words; but this time she stopped.

“Mr. Jenifer,” she had said, “I have engaged a man for next year. He is coming over to see you soon. I thought, perhaps, you would be willing to talk with him of what had best be done.”

“I shall be glad to.”

Ambler had thanked him and passed on.

“Miss Ambler,” Jenifer overtook her, “the fall is nearly gone.”

“Yes,” not understanding him. “I know. That is why I want the man to see you. You will soon be going.”

“In about a week.”

“So soon!” There was a frown between Ambler's dark brows.



"I had thought — I had feared — I heard — You will not be married before Christmas?" he blurted.

"No." She spoke shortly and hurried her steps, but Jenifer kept by her side.

"At all?" he insisted, with a sudden fierce catching at his breath.

"No!" She turned into a narrow path, and with an imperious gesture forbade him to follow her.

Jenifer's blood pounded in his veins as he remembered. Along the long road, that night when they stopped, along the higher ways next day, he saw her face, — neither sky that brushed the hills, nor peaks which swept against it, nor high red levels, nor bare and hazy woods, — only Ambler's face, dimpled of chin, red of mouth, broad of forehead; the dark eyes laughing, shining, cold, proud, friendly; — nothing beyond that, now that he could, at last, remember.

They climbed higher. Peaks rose straight and sheer before them and swept apart to show the way into their heart; the road narrowed to a trail and the bare boughs of apple-trees, the russet oaks, the time-stained house were behind. Wooten saw Jenifer's long turned head and searching gaze.

The old man was shrewd and not a word of the young woman at Briar Park had he spoken till now: "That sassy thing didn't get married this fall. Put it off?"

"No."

"Sent that fellow 'long 'bout his business?"

"I suppose so."

Wooten looked down at the hard red earth, and then

again at Jenifer. Something in the young man's eyes, some look of long waiting and hungry impatience smote him. The old man drew rein.

"Son," said he, "'tis nigh to Christmas "

"Two days."

"I've heard tell a curious thing 'bout Christmas eve." Jenifer turned in his saddle with his hand on the horse's back and his gaze, across Wooten's shoulder, still on the house, its empty porch and closed door.

"They tell me," Wooten went on, "that if a man goes out at Christmas eve, an' stan's under the apple-trees, — apple-trees, mind you, — an' looks straight up to the sky, he sees it open, an' looks right into Paradise, an' sees the angels." It was a legend of the Hollow. Wooten did not know that it was a twisted tradition of the Hessians.

"Son, 'tis nigh enough to the time not to count. Thar's your trail to Paradise, an' thar" — as Ambler came out on the porch — "thar's your angel." He laughed softly as he struck his horse a sharp cut and the beast leaped forward. But scarcely a yard ahead he flung the horse upon his haunches.

A resonant thrill was in the air. Across the peaks beat a mighty surge. It sang too high and strong for sorrow. Hope and triumph were in its strain. Wooten flung back his head to listen, and then, with a wild wave of his hand above his head, gave his horse rein and sprang up the trail.

Jenifer was out of his saddle. He strode under the trees, hearing nothing, knowing only that he was near Ambler, that he should speak, demand an answer of

her, demand herself. He had been a sturdy friend. He would be no gentle wooer.

"Ambler," she had crossed the stream and they met under the trees. Nothing but the screen of the bare apple-boughs was between them and the heavens.

"Listen!" the girl cried with head thrown back, her eyes wide open, and her face white and awed. "The Voice!" That had drawn her. To that she had been listening. She had not noticed how Jenifer had spoken her name. "You hear it?" turning slowly to the sound.

"I hear it." He caught both of her hands in his. "It says — 'The gates of heaven are open.' That is the strain of its music." His arms were close about her. "Beyond the apple-boughs, looking up" — he looked down at her shy, frightened, half-hidden face — "one sees — Paradise. God! I've waited for mine. I'll wait no longer. Ambler, that other man, he is forgotten? Long ago?"

"Long ago," she breathed.

"You love me?" he demanded.

But the wonder of it! This mastery from the man who had stood so long aside and gone on his quiet way, while she —

"You love me?" Jenifer's voice was hoarse.

"Yes," faint as the voice that died amongst the peaks, and as sweet.

"You are mine. I shall not leave you. You will go with me when I go."

The night wind blew her hair across his eyes. The new moon swung up beyond the mountains, but not so

fair upon the purpled heavens as was her arm about his neck. The breath of the wind stole past, but not so faint as the breath of her red lips. The last crimson flared across the west, but not so red as flamed her cheek when his lips pressed hot against her own. The last strain of The Voice swelled back again. It was the voice of joy.

THE END.

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